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Houston Texans Quarterback
MATT SCHAUB

WHO GIVES US A LITTLE FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE ON NUMBER TWO.

As much as we admire them, athletes are human with very human needs. And like the rest of us, their bodies are in tune with nature – and nature's call. After all, the mantra "When you gotta go, you gotta go" can come into play at any point before, after and during the game.

Q **Are you able to go comfortably before, after or even during the game?**

A Usually not during the game, but halftime can provide some interesting circumstances. Let's just say that my time to go through my normal halftime routine can be very limited.

Q **As a quarterback, you experience a very unique connection with your center. Any issues ever arise there?**

A I've been with the same center for a few years now, and he does a good job of letting me know if something is up. He's managed to keep things under control, which I'm very thankful for.

Q **Around the league, are there stories of players who make going part of their pregame ritual?**

A I think guys try to keep that as close to the vest as possible. You don't want those kind of stories getting out.

Q **Is there a protocol in place for emergency situations?**

A You do what you got to do and head back out there.

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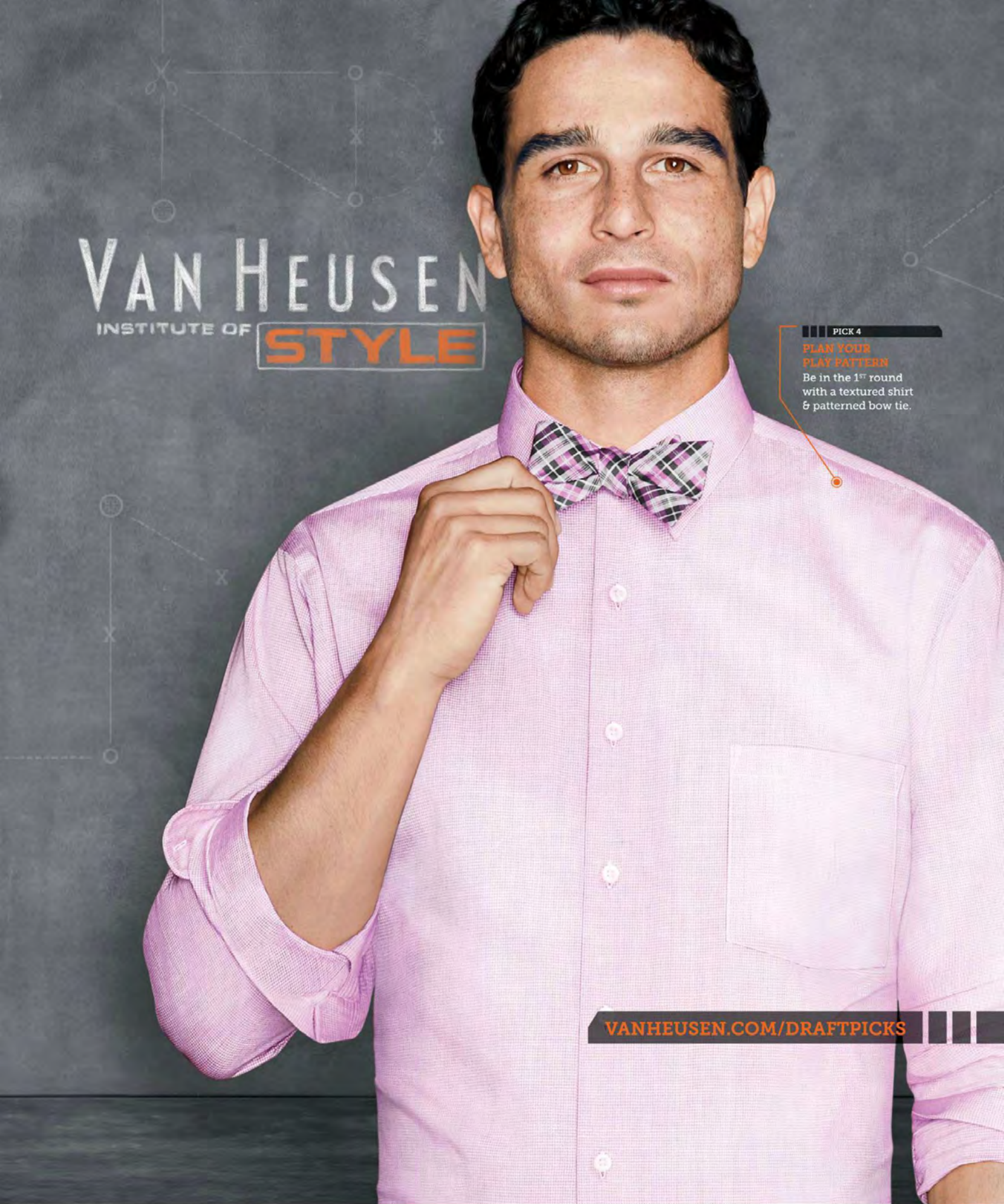
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Meet Luke Joeckel, Mel's and Todd's consensus No. 1 pick. The rest of the first round? A crapshoot.

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Will Dwight spend another year at Staples? Is CP3 long for the Clips? That's to be decided after the season, but Insider Amin Elhassan can tell you right now how much each is worth. Sign in to see his list of the 30 free agents who deserve the biggest paydays.

BEST MLB TRADE BETS

ESPN.COM SEARCH: JIM BOWDEN

Yes, the trade deadline is three months away, but according to Insider and former GM Jim Bowden, teams are already talking. For his 10 players most likely to be dealt (hint: a Padre is No. 1), check out Bowden's blog, where he'll offer exclusive intel all year.

TOP 2014 NFL DRAFT PROSPECTS

ESPN.COM SEARCH: MEL KIPER JR., TODD McSHAY

It's never too early for mock drafts and Big Boards. So after your team is done building through the 2013 draft, log on to Insider and find out where Todd McShay and Mel Kiper Jr. have the rising college stars on their first mock and board—everyone after Clowney, that is.

Insider Spotlight
MATT STEICHEN

ESPN Insider since April 4: The 29-year-old is justifiably proud of his "Bear cave" and the more than 3,000 sports autographs he has collected. But to the Chicago native, the memories mean more than memorabilia. "My dad taught me that going to the games and meeting the players is priceless," says Steichen, who hasn't bought a single signature. Last season he and his father, Craig, shared the love by taking a total of 75 wounded veterans to a game at all 32 NFL stadiums (All32in17.com) and set a world record for visiting all 32 in 103 days. "It changed my life," he says. "I'll never forget it." Mission accomplished.

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by HOWARD BRYANT

[KICK-STARTER] *The two-month slog that is the NBA playoffs could use a radical makeover. And our friends across the pond have given us the perfect idea.*

It's unclear which of the Ten Commandments dictates that the NBA season must be 82 games. But this new trend of coaches resting perfectly healthy players—a beautiful example of civil disobedience initiated by San Antonio's Gregg Popovich—reinforces the truth that the road to the Finals is an extended wasteland in need of reinvention.

The players must pace themselves, which means, for the sake of actually winning in June, they cannot always give maximum effort in the regular season—and probably shouldn't bother anyway when 53% of the league (16 of 30 teams) makes the postseason. The coaches, like Popovich and Miami's Erik Spoelstra, recognize the season's illegitimacy too, risking fines and the wrath of David Stern, who really should direct his anger at the closest mirror because he created this system. (Of course, the biggest loser is, as always, the customer paying to see Tim Duncan and LeBron James but getting Matt Bonner and Shane Battier.)

The NBA spectacle only gets more bloated in the playoffs, which last a full two months. That's 20% of the entire season. After six months, it shouldn't take another 60 days to crown a champion. The first round in particular is the biggest waste of time in sports. There is little drama (top seed Dallas losing to eighth-seeded Golden State in 2007 notwithstanding), and outside of grinding the players into powder for broadcast money, no point. Stretched for TV, it can take as long as two weeks, and it leaves underdogs with virtually no chance of a sustained run. The last time a team seeded sixth or lower won consecutive series was in 1999, when the Knicks made it to the Finals as a No. 8 seed.

From 1984 to 2002, when the first round was a best-of-five, the top three seeds won 86% of the time. In 2003 the NBA, selling magic beans to the public, expanded the first round to seven games—to legitimize the effort of good teams in the regular season, or so said Stern with a straight face. The result was the same: The top three seeds have won 85% of the time since then. Compare this to the NHL, a league with an intense first round. Since 2003, only 67% of the top three seeds have advanced.

The NBA likes to pretend the draft lottery is the dividing line between winning teams and rebuilding ones. But that line is an illusion meant to mask the mediocrity of all those perennial 38- to 44-victory teams that advance to the postseason, emptily claim a successful season, get slaughtered to the surprise of absolutely no one, rinse and repeat for the next season. As a recent Onion newswire put it, after Milwaukee clinched a postseason berth with a *losing* record: "Bucks qualify for first-round elimination from playoffs."

What the NBA needs is the courage to revolutionize. The best solution is to go English soccer and split the league into a Championship and a Premier League, so the best teams play one another exclusively and the weaker teams must improve to graduate to the adult table. The length of season could remain the same, but only the upper-division teams would be eligible to contend for the NBA championship. Suddenly, every game would actually mean something.

There are less radical remedies, though. For much of the past 15 years, the league has suffered from the massive imbalance of a weak Eastern Conference and a terrifically competitive Western. So for the playoffs, the NBA should simply do away with conferences and let the top 12 teams play in a super-postseason (half the league qualifying is too generous). The Celtics might play the Lakers before the Finals; the Heat might collide with the Thunder. And although, under this idea, eight of the 12 playoff teams in the 2010-11 season would have come from the Western Conference, the quality would improve (Memphis, as the theoretical No. 12 seed, won 46 games that year). Meanwhile, more people would watch; the good teams would be challenged immediately and wouldn't have to risk injury in a meaningless playoff series (see Rose, Derrick); and the league's flabby underbelly would actually be forced to win more games to be relevant.

Teams would have to compete to belong.

What a concept. ■

illustration by MARK SMITH

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by PETER KEATING

[GAME OF THROWS] *Which college quarterbacks will reign at the next level, and which will be the next Ryan Leaf? A few key variables hold all the answers.*

[A]s we approach the NFL draft on April 25, here's the headline from the analytics desk: We can now estimate how college QBs will do in the pros far better than when Peyton Manning vs. Ryan Leaf seemed like a toss-up.

The best system for projecting college quarterbacks is the Lewin Career Forecast by Football Outsiders. Launched in 2006, the LCF is named after David Lewin, a former Outsiders writer who is now scouting coordinator for the Boston Celtics. The key insight? The best college stats for predicting NFL performance are games started, which indicates successful experience, and completion percentage, which translates better than other metrics from one level of play to the next. (Manning completed 62.5% of passes and made 45 college starts; Leaf completed 53.8% and started 24 games.) The latest version of LCF, which looks at quarterbacks drafted in the first three rounds, also credits QBs who improve from their junior to senior seasons, penalizes those who play in minor conferences and distinguishes between pocket passers who run successfully (good) and scramblers who get sacked (bad). Last year the system loved Robert Griffin III and Andrew Luck but actually rated Russell Wilson over both of them, seeing value in his accuracy and huge improvement as a senior.

To be clear, some team statistics do project future success. Alok Pattani, an analyst for ESPN Stats & Info, has found that quarterbacks on excellent college teams don't tend to play as well in the NFL as QBs with similar scouting grades on worse squads. Apparently, a great team can make its QB look good, like Matt Leinart at USC, while a bad team can leave its quarterback underrated, like Jay Cutler at Vanderbilt. Pattani has also found that college QBs whose teams improve when they take over, as Boston College did with Matt Ryan, exceed expectations, while quarterbacks whose programs decline, like Brady Quinn at Notre Dame, underperform.

Most college stats, however, don't correlate well with pro success, and those include touchdowns, total yards and even yards per attempt. Most draft-combine measurables, like 40-yard-dash time, don't translate either. Every year you'll see a few physical specimens wow NFL talent evaluators. Then you'll see teams base their key decisions on a day or two of great workouts and wind up with Kyle Boller or JaMarcus Russell. To estimate NFL performance, you need to focus on a QB's entire career.

Looking at the variables isolated by LCF and Stats & Info, the numbers this year favor Geno Smith (started for three years, 67.4% completion rate, improved in his senior season) and Landry Jones (started four years, 63.6% completion rate). But both come with warning bells clanging: Smith was extremely inconsistent under center at West Virginia, and Oklahoma's spread offense probably boosted Jones' stats and obscured his immobility. So it's important to consider a final point: In the NFL, with its hard salary cap, player value is always relative to pay, because teams have only so much money to spend ($123 million apiece in 2013). And overspending on a quarterback is particularly damaging because QBs are so hard to replace.

That's why teams shouldn't reach for one in the first round (especially in a draft with no *well, of course* guys like Luck and Griffin). It's smarter to use your top pick on the player who offers the most reward per risk and hunt for a QB later—as the Bengals did when they drafted receiver A.J. Green No. 4 overall in 2011, then nabbed Andy Dalton in Round 2.

So keep an eye on Matt Barkley (started four years, 64.1% completion rate), whose stats project nearly as well as Smith's, despite a disappointing senior year in which he was hamstrung by USC's horrendously conservative playcalling. And in the next tier, watch Ryan Nassib (started three years at Syracuse, 60.3% completion rate) and EJ Manuel (started three years at Florida State, 66.9% completion rate), both of whom got better and whose teams improved considerably in their senior seasons.

If your favorite team takes Smith in the top 10 and he misses, it will be haunted for years. Just ask the Jets. If, however, your team lands Barkley or Nassib in the second or third round, it could set up a winning economic blueprint for the next decade. Just ask the Seahawks. ■

Illustration by MARK WEAVER

FROM LEFT: BRUCE SCHWARTZMAN/AP IMAGES; MELINA VASTOLA/USA TODAY SPORTS; CHRISTOPHER JACKSON/AP IMAGES

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ZOOM

WHO
Brian Hartline, Dolphins wide receiver

WHAT
Hartline's offseason job, working at Smart Stop Drive-Thru. He co-owns the store with his best friend, Ramy Malka (not pictured).

WHEN
April 6

WHERE
Canal Winchester, Ohio

"I'm going to put up some of my Buckeyes and Dolphins stuff as soon as I get a chance, but until then, we have fun with people who drive in and ask, 'Are you Brian Hartline?' Sometimes I say yes, and they still don't believe me. Other times we say, 'Why would you ever work here if you were that guy?' A lot of people come in and don't know what they want. But one morning, a dude came in and knew exactly what he wanted: two filter-tip Black and Milds, two Magnum condoms and a 35-cent pack of Winterfresh gum. I just had to shake my head and say, 'Pimpin' ain't easy, is it?'" —***BRIAN HARTLINE,*** *as told to Dan Friedell*

Photograph by
JORDAN HOLLENDER

"Michael Jordan was my Hercules, Zeus and Napoleon. When I was 7, my father bought me my first Air Jordans, the VIIs, and I cried right there in the mall. I own maybe 150 Jordans. My rarest one is the all-yellow IVs [not pictured]. One of the worst days of my life was when my brother, Anthony Stewart, broke into my closet last summer and wore those IVs before I'd rocked them myself. He even rubbed it in by posting a photo on Instagram. I was like, 'Oh, hell no!' Never been so mad. Now I have a rule: You can drive my car, sleep in my bed, use my toothbrush, but if you touch the left side of my shoe closet, the Jordans side, we'll have problems."
—***NATE ROBINSON**, as told to Sam Alipour*

Photograph by
TAYLOR CASTLE

1

Number of Air Jordan models Robinson doesn't own—the XX8, the newest one, worn by Thunder guard Russell Westbrook.

2

Times he has spoken to Jordan. "I didn't know what to call him," says Robinson. "MJ? Mr. Jordan?"

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PLAYBOOK

The team that dances together plays together: the Nuggets' pregame routine, before a 22-point home win over the Nets on March 29.

NBA

MILE HIGH, MILE DEEP

THE **NUGGETS** HAVE NO SUPERSTAR BUT MORE DEPTH THAN ANY NBA CHAMPIONS IN HISTORY (REALLY). SO WHO SAYS THEY CAN'T WIN A TITLE? *By Bradford Doolittle*

GARRETT W. ELLWOOD/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES

Bird's-eye view of a manimal: Faried has elevated the Nuggets to an NBA-best 109.4 ppg since Jan. 5.

Here's a little argument on behalf of the starless Nuggets: It's a mid-March game against the Bulls in Chicago, 16.9 seconds left in overtime, and the Nuggets are desperately trying to extend an 11-game winning streak. Denver trails 118-116 but has the ball, and coach George Karl is drawing up a play in the huddle during a timeout. On the opposing bench, Tom Thibodeau, the NBA's top defensive mind, is considering how to stop him.

The Bulls defense under Thibodeau is predicated on overloading the strong side and sealing off the paint, and with no reason to draw up a specialty defense to stop any one player on Denver, Chicago comes out in its base system. After the inbounds, Andre Miller—Denver's backup point guard, who has 12 assists on the night—rounds a pick and drives the right side of the lane. The Bulls sag toward him. Or, that is to say, they sag as much as they can. On the left block, Bulls forward Luol Deng must stick to Nuggets forward Wilson Chandler, who has already scored 35. Outside the arc, two Bulls shadow Nuggets forward Danilo Gallinari and guard Ty Lawson, both 16-plus-ppg scorers with ICBM range. But collapsing defenses are like your favorite T-shirt: Eventually holes will form. And as Bulls center Joakim Noah slides to double Miller, he's forced to abandon forward Andre Iguodala on the right wing. That's 2012 All-Star Andre Iguodala.

Miller, trapped, kicks out to Iguodala. Iggy drills a three. And the Nuggets' streak goes to 12.

Here's another argument: Two weeks later, on April 4, when Gallinari's season is cut short by a blown ACL, the number crunchers behind Basketball Prospectus will fire up their projection system to see how the team will be affected by the loss, simulating an entire season without Gallo, arguably the team's top player. The result: Denver's win total will be downgraded from 56.6 wins all the way to ... 56.4.

Argument 3: Since Feb. 23, the Nuggets are 19–2 (all stats through April 9). They are 29–6 since Jan. 20, and they've outscored their opponents by 8.1 ppg, good for third best in the league.

Argument 4: The typical NBA champion wins 83% of its home games. Denver this season: 92.1%.

Argument 5: The Nuggets are 9–5 against the Spurs, Thunder, Grizzlies and Clippers—the same Western Conference powers that critics contend Denver cannot beat.

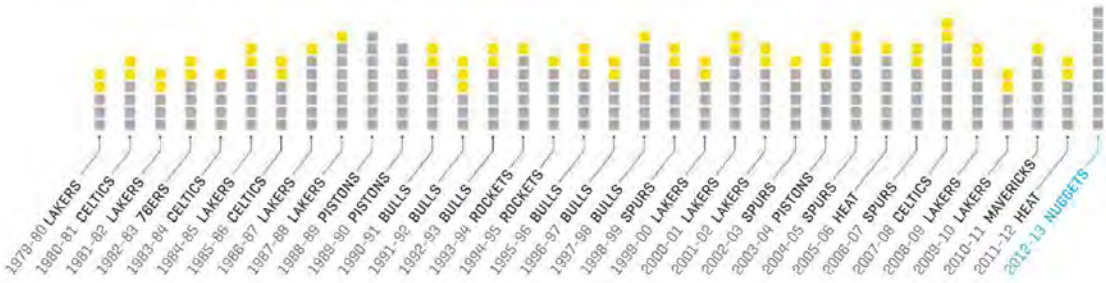
So why, then, does the conventional wisdom insist that the Nuggets—or any team like them—can never win it all?

***Thou shalt** not win an NBA title without a superstar.* It's a belief so old it feels eternal, as if it were the last of James Naismith's founding rules of basketball. (Just below *13. The side making the most goals ... shall be declared the winner.*)

It has been said so often, one might think it no longer needs saying. But apparently it does. In February Sam Smith, the longtime *Chicago Tribune* writer and author of *The Jordan Rules*, declared that to win an NBA title, "you need stars and more

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGHS

How deep and starless are the Nuggets? To answer that, we calculated the Wins Above Replacement Player for every member of every title team since 1980. The verdict: With 10 players in the top 40% of WARP, Denver is deeper than all of them. And with none in the top 5%? As starless as you can get.



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stars." On NBA.com the same month, writer Jeff Caplan argued that in the playoffs, "a team has got to have a go-to guy who can create his own shot ... when crunch time demands an isolation takeover."

Even Andre Miller got into the act last year, saying, "I still think you need a star to win in this league." When asked whether his team—designed specifically to be the exception to that so-called rule—could, in fact, be the exception to that rule, he said: "We won't be the exception. I'd like to say that, but once you get to the playoffs, it's a totally different story. I don't know when the last team that didn't have the stars won the championship."

One can hardly blame Miller, or anyone else, for holding to the notion. Each of the past 22 NBA title winners had at least one player in the top 5% in Wins Above Replacement Player. Eight of the past 33 title teams, including LeBron James' Heat last season, were led by the league leader in WARP. (The highest WARP on the Nuggets? Kenneth Faried, 39th in the NBA.) But if the NBA's history has proved anything, it's that patterns are meant to be broken.

Consider that through the first four decades of the NBA, it was considered impossible to win a title without a Hall of Fame center like Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, Bill Walton, Moses Malone or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. The past two decades? NBA titles have been won with Bill Laimbeer, Bill Cartwright, Luc Longley and Kendrick Perkins in the middle. Heck, the Heat didn't even use a center for much of their title run last season.

It was also once universally agreed that an NBA champion couldn't be built around a scoring champ. And for good reason: In a span of 40 seasons, 1950-51 to 1989-90, it happened only once (1970-71), when Lew Alcindor led the Bucks. Then from 1990-91 through 1997-98, Michael Jordan did it six times; and in 1999-2000, Shaquille O'Neal did it with the Lakers.

So what of the "rule" that starless teams must always fall short in the playoffs?

Don't ask Karl if that rule can be defied—or do, if you're eager to see a tightly wound man turn purple. In early March, a few wins into what would ultimately become a 15-game winning streak, Karl said: "Most of the people are going to say you can't win without a star. I'm tired of it. I'm fed up with it. I've been angry about it. It's a team game. I know Miami won the championship and had a superstar, but they were the best basketball *team*. Our job is to try to become the best basketball team. I honestly think it can be done. I think it's silly to not even have one person stand up and say it could be done."

Two weeks later, after his team's victory against the Bulls, Karl was asked about it again. "Yes," he said. "*Definitively* yes. I'm tired of the damn question. It's about making basketball plays. It's not about a guy making shots. It's about stops, possessions and

"YES. DEFINITIVELY YES ... I'M TIRED OF THE DAMN QUESTION."

—NUGGETS COACH GEORGE KARL, WHEN ASKED WHETHER HIS TEAM CAN WIN AN NBA TITLE WITHOUT A SUPERSTAR

MAG MINUTE

DWYANE WADE
HEAT GUARD

What question are you asked most by fans?
"Where is LeBron?"

What is your most irrational fear?
I'm petrified of birds. I got attacked by some when I was in college.

What is your favorite TV show right now?
Scandal.

What is your least favorite chore?
Besides all of them? I hate making the bed.

What music is stuck in your head these days?
2 Chainz. I like his lyrics.

Do you ever get nervous?
If I'm going into uncharted waters, doing something for the first time, sure. But I don't get nervous for games.

illustration by CHIP WASS
GARRETT W. ELLWOOD/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES

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efficiency. I think versatility is better than one guy."

Karl, of course, isn't the only coach who thinks, or hopes, that is true. The Grizzlies, Pacers and Warriors—even the Derrick Rose-less Bulls—are also built like a commune of sorts. But the Nuggets might be the team most perfectly constructed to shatter the starless ceiling.

By popular belief—and by the numbers (see chart on page 22)—the last NBA champ without a star was the 1989-90 Pistons. And if there was a method to Detroit's madness, it was the ability to take other teams out of their game. Not only did the Pistons' clutch-and-grab defense optimize the NBA rules at the time, it came with an upside: The fewer the points, the less the game was about what you wanted to do (score) and more about what they wanted to do (elbow you in the face).

Likewise, the form of the Nuggets' roster perfectly mirrors its function. Every part of the team is designed to transform its supposed shortcoming—that lack of a superstar—into an asset. Consider: In a pick-and-roll league based on penetration, nothing succeeds like fresh legs and depth. And the Nuggets turn that depth into pace. "Almost every game we play is about how much pace we can put into it," Karl says. "We play better in flow, we play better fast." The Nuggets' relentless D, with fresh-legged defenders cheating passing lanes, has yielded it the league's second-most steals per game. And that leads to transition baskets ... and bolsters the league's second-highest pace ... and, when coupled with Denver's thin air, sucks the life out of teams not acclimated to it. There's a reason the Nuggets' home record is 35-3. Playing the team in Denver is like running a relay race on Mount Fuji, only the other guys have twice as many runners.

If the Nuggets beat your stars, they'll do it as a team. Which raises one final argument: In a league of increasingly prohibitive luxury taxes, the Nuggets might represent the NBA's most sustainable economic model: broad talent, spread wide, compensated equally. In other words, should Denver defy expectations by winning the NBA title without a superstar, it might be less the breaking of a rule than the glimpsing of a future. ■

How functional is Denver? Enough to mine gold from misunderstood genius JaVale McGee (below right), whose 20.8 PER leads the team.

CENTERS OF INATTENTION

Over the past six decades, the NBA game has evolved from big-man battles to the modern dance of the wing men. The MVP Award has followed suit. From towering winners like Chamberlain, Russell and Kareem to smaller showmen like Iverson, Nash and Rose, bigger is now rarely the best, as this chart of MVPs shows. —IGOR GURYASHKIN

DANNY JOHNSTON/AP IMAGES

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by J.D. Power and Associates[1]

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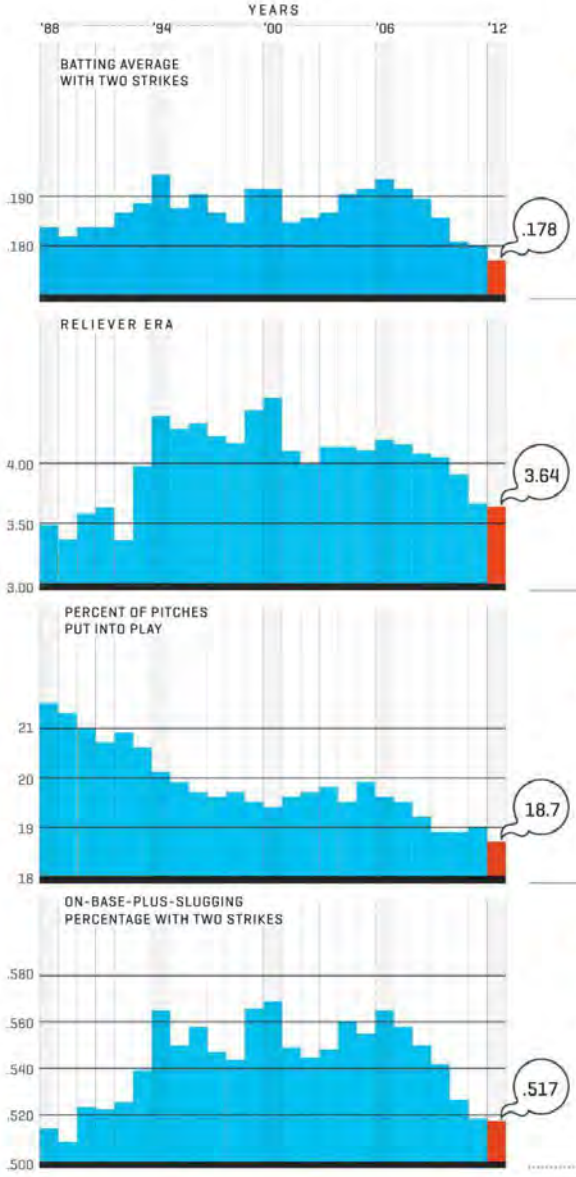
TWO STRIKES, YOU'RE OUT

White Sox ace Chris Sale knows he's in control with two strikes. "You can throw it over the batter's head, below his feet, behind him," says the South Side southpaw. "You can do anything you want." Why so cocky? Since 2006—and especially last year—there's been a shift in the balance of power with two strikes, leading not only to more K's but also to worse at-bats, period. What's up with hitters today? —MATT BEARDMORE



THEY'RE PSYCHED OUT

Eight-time NL batting champ Tony Gwynn notwithstanding, most of the best hitters of the past quarter-century have been just average when facing a two-strike count—we're talking even Derek Jeter (.230) and Albert Pujols (.258). And 2012 marked the sixth consecutive season that the two-strike BA dropped, all the way to .178. In MLB's mental game, bad endings have a way of leading to more bad endings. "It's two strikes—you've only got one to go" is how Brewers 2B Rickie Weeks, a .172 guy with that pressure on, describes the thinking.

THEY FACE FLAMES EARLY, MIDDLE AND LATE

Average fastball velocity increased in each of the past four seasons, to 91.8 mph in 2012, according to FanGraphs. And the heat isn't relieved once you drive the starter out of the game. "When I was coming up, you had the closer and a setup man throwing 95," Weeks says. "Now you've got five guys in the bullpen throwing 95-plus." Relievers have also grown more efficient—last year's BBs/9 innings (3.46) was their lowest in three decades, while K's/9 innings has risen every year since 2005—letting them challenge, and beat, hitters in any inning.

THEY SWING AND THEY ...

... miss. Last season only 18.7 percent of pitches were put into play, a 25-year low, and the percent of swings and misses has increased every year since 2005. Need more proof that pitchers are getting ahead and batters can't catch up? The trend of more 0-2 counts (15,751, most in 25 years) comes with the trend of fewer walks (14,709, least in 26 years), there has been a strikeout record set every year since 2008 and OBP has dropped every year since 2006. The Diamondbacks' Martin Prado says it best: "Baseball is getting harder and harder."

THEY'RE SWINGIN' FOR NOTHIN'

"When I came up, a strikeout was a failure. In today's culture, a strikeout is okay," Gwynn says. Credit a hangover from a long steroids era that instilled an appetite for swinging for the fences. "Teams are more tolerant of strikeouts if you're hitting homers and driving in runs," Angels catcher Chris Iannetta says. But if RBIs once made up for K's, free swinging isn't productive anymore. To be exact, since 2006 two-strike OPS has dropped each year, to .517, the lowest in 23 years. Take it from Chris Sale: Today it's the pitchers who have all the power.

DATA FROM STATS LLC. SELECT STATS DATE TO 1988

BEST OF THE WORST

In a game in which hitting .300 is considered great, hitting .300 with two strikes is out of this world. Last season only two players hit better than .270 with two strikes.

BEST TWO-STRIKE HITTERS SINCE 1988

1	Tony Gwynn 1988-2001	.302
2	Todd Helton 1997-2012	.262
3	Ichiro Suzuki 2001-2012	.261
4	Juan Pierre 2000-2012	.261
5	Wade Boggs 1988-1999	.260

"MY OBJECTIVE WAS TO PUT THE BAT ON THE BALL. IF I HAD STRUCK OUT THAT MUCH, I'D HAVE RETIRED." —TONY GWYNN

BEST TWO-STRIKE HITTERS IN 2012

1	Martin Prado Braves IF/OF*	.286
2	Jayson Werth Nationals RF	.286
3	Matt Carpenter Cardinals IF	.268
4	Joe Mauer Twins C	.266
5	Prince Fielder Tigers 1B	.265

"SOME GUYS LOOK FOR ONE PITCH. NOT ME—I LOOK TO PUT ON A GOOD SWING AND HIT A LINE DRIVE INTO THE GAP." —MARTIN PRADO

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"I JUST WANT TO HAVE IT AT HOME AND SHOW IT TO MY KIDS," PENCE SAYS OF HIS SHATTERED BAT, WHICH WAS SOLD TO TWO FANS FOR $400 LAST OCTOBER.

SPORTIFACT

LUMBER OF LOVE

For those of you who think baseball bats are just fungible assets from a dead tree, meet Fryer, a 34-inch, 32-ounce Louisville Slugger D200. On the night of Oct. 22, 2012, Giants outfielder Hunter Pence brought his beloved Fryer to the plate in the third inning of the NLCS with the bases loaded and the Giants leading 2-0 against the Cardinals. Pence swung at a fastball that nearly broke the bat in half. But the cracked barrel somehow still hit the ball again ... and again before sending it spinning wildly into centerfield. The "triple-double" cleared the bases and propelled San Francisco to a 9-0 victory—and, ultimately, a championship. Sadly, when Pence went to retrieve the bat after the game, he found out that Fryer had been sold for $400 in the stadium store to Giants diehards Rick and Terri Alagna. Ah, but this story had one more twist: Upon learning that Pence still wanted Fryer, the couple arranged for a reunion at Game 1 of the World Series. By Opening Day, Fryer had a new home: a display case at AT&T Park, with other relics of the Giants' epic 2012 season. Now fans can thank "him" in person. —STEVE WULF

photographs by DWIGHT ESCHLIMAN

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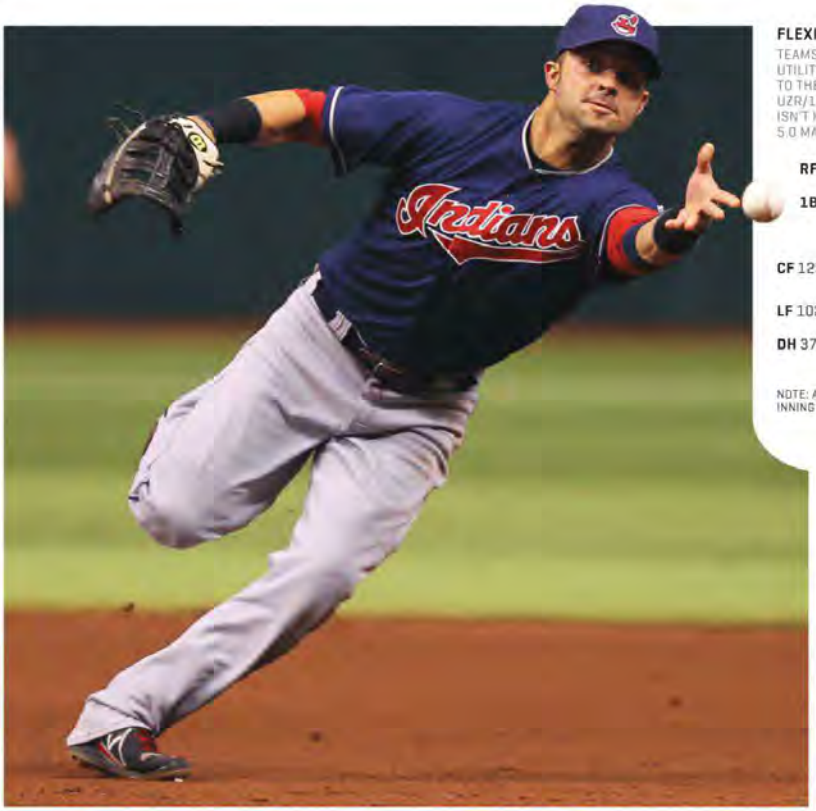

FLEXIBLE GLOVE

TEAMS LIKE SWISHER'S UTILITY. BUT FAIR WARNING TO THE INDIANS: HIS CAREER UZR/150 OF **1.9 AT FIRST** ISN'T HALF AS GOOD AS HIS 5.0 MARK IN RIGHTFIELD.

NOTE: ALSO PITCHED ONE INNING OF RELIEF IN 2009

THE NEXT ROUND

OHIO PLAYER

NEW INDIANS SLUGGER **NICK SWISHER** TOLD REPORTERS "IT HURT" THAT THE YANKEES LET HIM GO. YEAH, BRO—FOR ABOUT TWO WHOLE SECONDS. *By Thomas Golianopoulos*

Were you surprised when your contract talks with the Yankees didn't pan out?
No, I knew early in the offseason I wasn't coming back. But as sad as that was, it made the free agency process a little easier because I knew the place I had called home for four years wasn't an option. So then it was great to get the love from Cleveland that I did, and now I'm locked in with these guys. It's the next chapter, man.

Definitely. New city, new team, new position. How's it all treating you so far?
It's great, man. It's like I'm coming back to the beginning: There are a lot of new guys on the squad, so we're all trying to get to know each other and find our identity as a team. We're doing our work and we're having a blast. It's a great vibe; I'm excited to see what this team is capable of.

In New York, it was World Series or bust. Different in Cleveland?
I'm an Ohio boy, so when I think of the Indians, I think of the '90s and the domination of the Tribe. Cleveland really was rocking at that time. That shows you what this city will bring for a contender. Yeah, it's been a bit since Cleveland had that buzz, but this group has great bats and some serious speed. Us guys, we're all excited to be part of the team to bring that back.

That sounds better than the Bronx, where the fans seemed to turn on the team a bit last year.
You can't fire up old storms, bro. I'm not commenting on that.

How about Terry Francona, another new face in Cleveland?
I'm super happy he's the guy leading our ship. You don't pick up a guy like him if you don't expect to win soon. He caught a bum rap in Boston. That stuff had to fall on somebody, and so it fell on him.

You're playing first rather than outfield, and you're batting cleanup. More pressure on you?
Man, it's all the same game, the one I've loved and the only thing I wanted to do since I was 6. I'm fortunate to be one of 750 guys who live the dream. So yeah, I want to go out and give it everything, but I'm just going to continue to be me. I don't know how to do anything else.

Any goals for the season?
I'm not an awards guy or a stat guy. It's about having a blast and enjoying every second. The window of opportunity in this game is so small, so I go out and give all I've got with a smile on my face, and when I put my head on my pillow at night, man, I sleep very well.

TOOLS OF IGNORANCE?

Hardly. As this season's hiring of ex-catchers John Gibbons (Jays) and Mike Redmond (Marlins) proves again, there's no better way to become a big league manager than to get dusty behind the dish. Why? "To be a really good catcher, you've got to be a leader and on top of the game," Redmond says. —DOUG MITTLER

12 Current managers—from Redmond, 42, to Jim Leyland, 68—who were catchers. That's more than double the number of leftfielders (5), the second most popular ex-position.

17 Thirty-year increase in the percentage of Opening Day skippers who wore the mask back in the day. That number has risen from 23% in 1983 to today's astonishing 40%.

4 Out of four, skippers of last year's LCS teams who once caught (Detroit's Leyland, SF's **Bruce Bochy**, St. Louis' Mike Matheny and the Yankees' Joe Girardi).

5 World Series titles won by catchers-turned-managers now at the helm. With two rings, Bochy is touted as HOF material, like Joe Torre (903 games at catcher) before him.

FROM TOP: MARK LOMOGLIO/ICON SMI; EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES

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TENNIS

SERBIAN ACE **JANKO TIPSAREVIC**, 28, ON THE BACK 'PACK BEHIND HIS BIG BACKHAND:

"I don't have a huge serve or forehand, so I need to fight for points. That's why a few years ago I started stretching like crazy, eating better and spending more time in the gym. I want to say that I put hours and hours into my muscles, but I don't. The only body parts I work really hard on are my abs and lower back because the core is important for tennis. We do a lot of twisting, and all of our movement starts from the core, so having a strong center lets you hit strokes faster and helps prevent injury. But I try to use my body weight, not machines. That gives me better control no matter what exercise I'm doing. My friends tease me about having a six-pack on my back. I know it looks a little creepy, but I worked to get those back muscles. I'm not ashamed to take my shirt off in practice."

photograph by DUSTIN SNIPES

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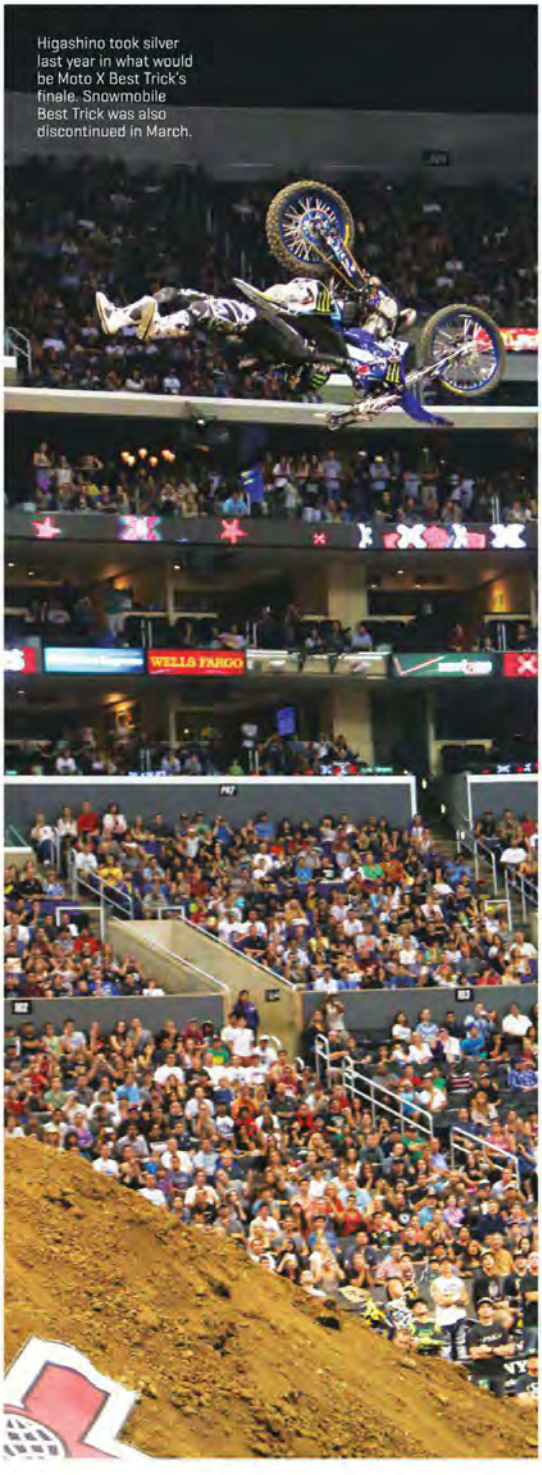

Higashino took silver last year in what would be Moto X Best Trick's finale. Snowmobile Best Trick was also discontinued in March.

GROUNDED TO A HALT

IN THE WAKE OF DEATHS IN FREESTYLE MOTOCROSS, ESPN HAS CANCELED THE **BEST TRICK EVENT** FOR X GAMES FOZ DO IGUAÇU IN BRAZIL AND BEYOND. THE SPORT'S BIGGEST NAMES WEIGH IN. *—as told to Brett Smith*

TAKA HIGASHINO 28
BEST TRICK DEBUT 2010
MEDAL COUNT

We didn't think about people dying before Jeremy Lusk was killed [in 2009 at an event in Costa Rica]. It was just injuries, just broken bones. Now it's different: It's too crazy dangerous. Some people, whether they land their trick in practice or not, they just go for it at X Games. I never tried the go-for-it trick; I just can't do it like that. And now Eigo Sato has died [in February], and he was just practicing a backflip. He was like a brother, and I respected him a lot. After thinking about it, it makes me nervous every single jump.

KYLE LOZA 26
BEST TRICK DEBUT 2007
MEDAL COUNT

I really didn't think Best Trick was going to be pulled from X Games, and once it was, it changed my mindset. I have always wanted to transition into freestyle and take all of my tricks and do a run, but it was a really big step that I didn't think I was ready to take. Now that it's happening—and I'm getting pushed into that situation—it has been really good. It has definitely made me train way harder than ever. I ride because I like making up new stuff, so you're going to see freestyle runs that you've never seen before.

BRIAN DEEGAN 38
BEST TRICK DEBUT 2001
MEDAL COUNT

Without Best Trick, the innovation of the sport is going to fizzle out. They're clipping the best event at X Games. There is a way to do it and make it safe; only invite guys who are top 10 in freestyle or guys who have won the event. Take out these guys who are one-trick sensations and narrow it down to professional athletes. Freestyle motocross is dangerous—whether you're going to do one trick or 12 in a freestyle run—and that's what attracts people to it, and that's why riders like the thrill of it.

JACKSON STRONG 21
BEST TRICK DEBUT 2011
MEDAL COUNT

I was definitely let down when Best Trick was called off. It was always one of the highest points of an athletic competition. There's so much training—mental and physical—and so much work that goes into that competition. But we've still got Moto X Freestyle. The guys out there who liked Best Trick are going to throw them down in their freestyle runs, so it's just going to make the event that much more exciting. I'm going to try to keep doing my best tricks in my freestyle run.

TRAVIS PASTRANA 29
BEST TRICK DEBUT 2001
MEDAL COUNT

Best Trick was a glimpse into the future, and it was where you found out what may or may not be possible. For them to take that out is to take out a staple of why X Games is still a fun thing to watch. But it's the best way to keep it a positive thing with actual athletes, role models for kids, guys who understand sport and longevity and training and everything else. That's all good, but you're slowing down the progression, which is kind of what freestyle is all about, so it's a double-edged sword.

CAM SINCLAIR 29
BEST TRICK DEBUT 2010
MEDAL COUNT

My first reaction, because of all of the guys who have been passing away lately, was that in a way, it's a good idea. But at the same time, it's been my favorite event, and before I rode X Games, I watched it for years and years. I was looking forward to competing in it for the next couple of years. I still don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing. I'm still upset from losing all of our friends from pushing themselves. The positive will be slowing the injuries down and keeping the sport safer.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: BO BRIDGES; ERIC LARS BAKKE/ESPN IMAGES; CHRIS MCPHERSON; DAVID LIVINGSTON/GETTY IMAGES; ALLEN BEREZOVSKY/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES; ALLEN KEE/ESPN IMAGES; BO BRIDGES

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LAST MEN STANDING

This spring has held all the drama of a 4-0 thumping, as the Bundesliga, English Premier League, La Liga and Serie A have their winners all but decided with weeks to go. But at least the **UEFA Champions League** (semis April 23-May 1; final on May 25) promises some compelling storylines. For the first time, the final four is evenly split between teams from two countries: Real Madrid and Barcelona from Spain's La Liga and Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund from Germany's Bundesliga (matchups TBA as of press time). And with the players below leading in very different roles, this show will deliver more than just Spanish flair vs. German brawn. —RACHEL ULLRICH

REAL MADRID
RAPHAEL VARANE DEFENDER

With a teammate like Cristiano Ronaldo, headlines can be hard to come by—especially for a player on the back line. But with a commanding 6'3" frame and the control and composure that belies his 20 years, Varane has had as much impact for Real this year as Ronaldo and his Champions League-best 11 goals. Signed in 2011 from the French squad Lens, Varane has emerged as a starter this season in both La Liga and Europe. Not only can he lock down the middle against the likes of Lionel Messi and Didier Drogba, he is sublimely skilled in bringing the ball up from the back.

EXPERT TAKE Varane has used the tournament to transform from raw bench player to world-class starter. What sets him apart is that he reads the game like a savvy vet, not a young prospect. —*Roger Bennett*

36

NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL CLEARANCES BY VARANE IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE PLAY THIS SEASON, THE TEAM'S MOST BY 11.

19

NUMBER OF TIMES REUS HAS SUCCESSFULLY BEATEN DEFENDERS ONE-ON-ONE IN UCL GAMES, SECOND MOST ON HIS SQUAD.

UCL RESULTS SINCE 2008

	GS	16	QF	SF	F	W
2012	■	■	■	■		
2011	■	■	■	■		
2010	■	■				
2009	■	■				
2008	■	■				

	GS	16	QF	SF	F	W
2012	■					
2011	DNQ					
2010	DNQ					
2009	DNQ					
2008	DNQ					

BORUSSIA DORTMUND
MARCO REUS MIDFIELDER

There's no bigger hometown hero in Dortmund than Reus, who entered the city's youth club in 1996. The 23-year-old returned as a pro last year, after three seasons at Borussia Monchengladbach. In the Champions League quarters, his deft placement off a rebound began Dortmund's unlikely two-goal, injury-time comeback in a 3-2 win over surprise Malaga. Elusive and with lightning pace, he's a constant threat on counterattacks and is particularly dangerous when he knifes inside. With 15 goals in 37 games across all competitions, Reus is clearly feeling right at home.

EXPERT TAKE Reus is the attacking brain that springs Dortmund's viciously overwhelming transition game. Able to relentlessly mine space, Reus can play through the middle or down the flanks. —*R.B.*

BARCELONA
LIONEL MESSI STRIKER

At age 25, Messi is already a four-time FIFA Player of the Year and holds records for goals scored in a calendar year (91), goals scored in a La Liga season (50), La Liga hat tricks in a season (8) and most goals in a Champions League game (5). In his ninth season with the Barca senior team, Messi is the master of holding on to the ball. Over the past three seasons, he has lost possession on just 3.3% of touches. Messi's late presence in the second leg of the quarterfinal, even with a bum hamstring, was distracting enough to allow Pedro to score the goal that sent the team through.

EXPERT TAKE Messi's movement when he does not have the ball is brilliant; he almost glides into dangerous positions. His speed and agility to evade tackles is another plus point. Genius! —*Steve McManaman*

8

NUMBER OF GOALS MESSI HAS SCORED ON JUST 40 SHOTS IN UCL. HIS 20% CONVERSION RATE IS FOUR POINTS HIGHER THAN RONALDO'S.

26

NUMBER OF TACKLES SCHWEINSTEIGER HAS MADE IN UCL PLAY, TOPS ON BAYERN, WHICH MAY EXPLAIN WHY HE HAS ALSO DRAWN THE TEAM'S MOST FOULS (22).

UCL RESULTS SINCE 2008

	GS	16	QF	SF	F	W
2012	■	■	■	■		
2011	■	■	■	■	■	■
2010	■	■	■	■		
2009	■	■	■	■	■	■
2008	■	■	■	■		

	GS	16	QF	SF	F	W
2012	■	■	■	■	■	■
2011	■	■				
2010	■	■	■	■	■	■
2009	■	■	■			
2008	DNQ					

BAYERN MUNICH
BASTIAN SCHWEINSTEIGER MIDFIELDER

In this year's UCL, Bayern's ball-possession percentage is second only to Barca's—and Schweinsteiger's football IQ and accuracy have much to do with that. His playmaking has led to 6,438 completed passes over the past three years, the 10th most in UCL and the four major leagues. This season Bayern's weakest performance (2-0 loss to Arsenal) was the only UCL game he missed, out with a yellow card accumulation. At 28, Schweinsteiger has been a Bayern boy since joining the youth system at 13.

EXPERT TAKE Schweinsteiger gets the toughest defensive assignments and also has to get forward in support of the attack. I feel he can establish himself as one of Europe's best midfielders. —*Shoka Hislop*

STATISTICS COMPILED BY ALBERT LARCADA, ESPN STATS & INFO

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ANGEL MARTINEZ/REAL MADRID/GETTY IMAGES; STUART FRANKLIN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES (2); AFP/GETTY IMAGES

ALL HEART

ONE-HANDED FIGHTER **NICK NEWELL** SAYS HE'S READY FOR THE UFC. BUT IS DANA WHITE READY FOR HIM?

By Chuck Mindenhall

Nick Newell circles to his right, in a southpaw stance, as XFC lightweight champ Eric Reynolds sizes him up. Though undefeated, Newell is the underdog in this December matchup—but he's not about to fight like it. He fires leg kicks, then head kicks. When Reynolds presses, Newell, a former Connecticut all-state wrestler, latches onto his waist. Now the fight is in his world.

He suplexes Reynolds, takes his back, grabs the neck and squeezes. Seconds later his opponent taps, and the 27-year-old Newell is XFC's new champ. "There was this feeling of happiness and relief," he says. "Because this is a fight the bookmakers didn't have me winning."

He's used to it. After all, it's hard to look past what isn't there—he was born without a left hand and much of the forearm. But Newell hopes UFC president Dana White sees a fighter who is hard to take down and has a solid chin, precise kicks and a loaded right hand. Newell has ended eight of his nine fights in the first round, including the Reynolds bout. Against Chris Coggins last April, Newell showed how he compensates for his handicap. Coggins sunk in a rear naked choke, which most fighters try to pry off with two hands. But Newell escaped by maneuvering his body and won by decision. "My advantage is my heart," he says.

But is that enough to earn a UFC shot? White isn't sure. "The best in the world fight in the UFC, and let me tell you, it's tough with two arms and two legs," he says. Of course, White is more likely to take a chance on a fighter who can drive fan interest. See James Toney and Kimbo Slice.

Newell insists he wouldn't crumble in the Octagon like those guys did. His next shot to prove his chops comes on June 14, when he defends his belt against Scott Holtzman. "I've always worked hard to get what I've gotten," he says. "There are a lot of weapons I can use in MMA. I just can't hit you with a left cross."

FOR YOUR VIEWING PLEASURE

MMA's next superfight could be around the corner. On April 27, Jon Jones (near right) meets Chael Sonnen at UFC 159. Three months later, Anderson Silva (far right) faces Chris Weidman at UFC 162. If both fighters win, Dana White can see a November main event of **Jones vs. Silva**. That'd be one of the UFC's biggest draws ever, says Wrestling Observer's Dave Meltzer. Here's what it would be fighting for the honor of most PPV buys ever.

SOURCE: MMAPAYOUT.COM BLUE BOOK

photograph by COLE BARASH

FROM LEFT: AL BELLO/ZUFFA LLC/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID BECKER/AP IMAGES

LOOK LEFT, HIT RIGHT

IT MAY RESEMBLE A CARNIVAL GAME, BUT **DYNAVISION'S D2 MACHINE** IS MAKING FOOTBALL PLAYERS FASTER AND SMARTER. *By Igor Guryashkin*

In the weeks leading to February's NFL combine, the draft hopefuls at the IMG Academy sweated through an intense battery of drills and workouts. But they may have exercised their synapses hardest of all, thanks to an electronic version of Whac-a-Mole called the Dynavision D2 machine.

First, the players stood in front of a large board studded with blinking lights, which would each randomly flash for a few seconds. The players would then slap each light as quickly as possible while a technician evaluated their response times. Did we mention a screen just above the middle of the board that would display numbers, letters and math equations, which the players would have to read aloud as the lights flashed?

The Dynavision D2 is as entertaining as it sounds, but it has a much deeper purpose. According to University of Cincinnati neurology professor and athletic trainer Joseph Clark, who uses the D2 in his research, it's a pioneering way to measure and improve players' hand-eye coordination, reaction times and peripheral awareness. And that could result in increased on-field awareness—like "wiping away the dirt on a camera lens while also adding pixels," he says.

David da Silva, who heads the vision training programs at the Bradenton, Fla.–based IMG Academy, says the $15,000 machines can improve reaction time by a tenth of a second in as few as three sessions—the difference between beating a lineman off the line or getting pancaked. One of the top performers among linebackers at this year's academy, according to da Silva? Heisman finalist Manti Te'o—not that it slowed his draft free fall. (For more on his future, see page 72.)

IMG began using Dynavision machines two years ago, and the technology is also a fixture in the Steelers' locker room, where offensive linemen vie for supremacy in the test every Thursday during the season. But that's just the beginning of its potential applications. Forty Veterans Affairs hospitals use Dynavision to retrain hand-eye coordination in soldiers who have suffered traumatic brain injuries. Similarly, because delayed reaction time can be a symptom of a concussion, the University of Cincinnati is using it as a tool to address football players' head injuries. Team officials take a baseline measurement of each player's score at the beginning of the season, and they won't let someone return after a concussion until he can meet that baseline. "It works for me in both diagnostics and rehabilitation," Clark says. "And if there are athletes who want to improve their performance, I can write programs for that too."

No doubt, in a flash.

1. LOOK ALIVE
Seeing the lights requires surveying 16 square feet.

2. HIT IT FAST
Lights can flash randomly or in a set pattern to the player's blind spots.

3. ADD IT UP
An advanced setting requires the user to read numbers or letters off a screen while hitting the lights.

4. CHECK THE SCORE
Real-time results chart improvements, allowing intra-team competition.

Illustration by BRYAN CHRISTIE DESIGN

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COMING DOWN

Former Tigers Kitchens, Mosley, McNeil and Goodwin were charged with armed robbery two months after winning a ring.

AS AUBURN WAS BARRELING TOWARD THE 2010 NATIONAL TITLE, THE PROGRAM WAS STRUGGLING TO BEAT A PERPLEXING DRUG PROBLEM. THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW SYNTHETIC MARIJUANA INFILTRATED THE TIGERS AND HELPED LEAD TO THE QUICKEST COLLAPSE OF A BCS CHAMP.

by SHAUN ASSAEL photograph by ADAM VOORHES

MICHAEL DYER WAVES the smoke out of his eyes and tries to focus on the question: *"Can we have your gun?"*

On one side of him, an Auburn teammate is nodding off, too sick and tired from his high to stay awake. Another teammate is holding his stomach and retching while his brain burns.

Dyer, a 20-year-old running back coming off a record-setting freshman season in 2010, is celebrating the start of spring break at a friend's off-campus apartment, drinking beer and smoking chemically coated leaves that are sold in gas stations under the name Spice. But the mood turns serious when fellow freshman teammate Shaun Kitchens asks: "Man, let me use your strap. We need to go hit a lick."

The "strap" is a .45-caliber handgun with a laser sight stashed beneath the couch in Dyer's apartment. But Dyer, according to his subsequent interview with police, isn't interested in committing a robbery on this night, or any night. Not when he's just two months removed from single-handedly marching Auburn down the field in the final seconds of the Jan. 10, 2011, BCS title game, giving the school its first national championship since 1957. Not when two more seasons stand between him and a first-round spot in the 2013 NFL draft.

So after he and his friends finish watching an NBA game, Dyer announces that he's leaving to pack for a trip home to Little Rock, Ark. But as he will later recall under oath, Dyer isn't in his apartment long before he's visited by another freshman who was partying with the group earlier. Antonio Goodwin, a wide receiver from Atlanta, is usually reserved. But at this moment, he seems antsy, eyes darting, and once again brings up "hitting a lick."

"He had this look in his eyes I hadn't seen before," Dyer later tells the police. "I tried to be a man and tell him I wasn't going and, you know, he shouldn't go because, to be honest, Antonio is not really that type of guy," Dyer later tells a jury.

But Goodwin isn't listening, and in the early hours of March 11, 2011, coach Gene Chizik will awaken to an avalanche of bad news that will eventually reveal what had been successfully kept under wraps during an undefeated 2010 season: Some of the very stars who delivered Auburn a BCS title were users of the most devastating synthetic drug sweeping the country.

IN AUGUST 2010, as the Tigers prepared to kick off the season against Arkansas State, director of sports medicine Joseph Petrone made 600 copies of a newspaper article he'd just read about Spice, a chemically altered drug being marketed as incense and sold at gas stations and mini-marts around Alabama. Petrone wasn't alone in his concern—athletic departments from coast to coast were just learning of Spice.

Its active chemical is a vestige of research done in the 1980s by a Clemson University researcher named John W. Huffman. In an effort to better understand the properties of cannabinoids and how they relate, he engineered a series of compounds that acted on the same parts of the brain as marijuana. As is general practice for chemists, Huffman named each iteration after himself. The first one that would make headlines was known as JWH-018.

Huffman never tested the compounds on humans, and his research never left the lab, getting relegated to musty textbooks. But two decades later, German chemists rediscovered JWH-018 as a popular club drug. It had been turned into a powder form that could be mixed with a liquid solvent and sprayed onto potpourri-style leaves.

No two batches of synthetic marijuana are exactly the same; one group of leaves could be sprayed with higher concentrations of JWH than another, rendering it potentially life-threatening. By 2009, Spice was sold freely over the Internet, marketed in shiny cellophane packages that looked like candy wrappers, often with the phrase "not for human consumption." The American Association of

"COMING DOWN" FIRST RAN APRIL 4 ON ESPN.COM. FOR THE UPDATED DIGITAL VERSION, GO TO ESPN.COM AND SEARCH: SPICE.

PAGE 43: AUBURN POLICE DEPARTMENT/AP IMAGES (4). THIS SPREAD FROM LEFT: KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES; RICHARD MACKSON/USA TODAY SPORTS

THE BEST OF TIMES
Dyer celebrates a run that set up the game-winning field goal against Oregon in the 2011 BCS title game, delivering Chizik and Auburn the coveted crystal football.

Poison Control Centers found itself fielding calls from emergency room physicians who had no idea what was causing the strange, alarming symptoms they were suddenly confronting. By 2010, 11,406 people nationwide were admitted to emergency rooms with those signs.

"If you take the worst effects of meth, crack and LSD, that's what they were seeing," says Dr. Mark Ryan, head of the Louisiana Poison Control Center. "These people were paranoid, psychotic. For lack of a better term, they were out of their minds."

So after Petrone read about an Alabama law that became effective on July 1, 2010, criminalizing the possession or sale of JWH-018, he made copies of the article and placed one in the locker of every Auburn athlete.

FROM 2002 TO 2006, Gene Chizik was one of the hottest assistant coaches in the country. He was Auburn's defensive coordinator during an undefeated season in '04, then was hired as an assistant head coach at Texas, where he won a BCS title the following year. In November 2006, Iowa State threw nearly $1.1 million at the square-jawed former Florida linebacker to rebuild its program. But Chizik never clicked, and his first season was a 3–9 disaster. He ended 2008 on a 10-game losing streak.

Despite his struggles, Chizik drew strong interest from Auburn when Tommy Tuberville's decadelong run ended after a 36-0 loss to Alabama in the 2008 Iron Bowl. Traditionalists around the program loved the idea of Chizik's power football philosophy, and he convinced them that the chip on his shoulder from the Iowa State failure would inspire the floundering Auburn program.

Just shy of his 47th birthday, with a 5–19 head-coaching record, the Clearwater, Fla., native was handed the head job by Auburn athletic director Jay Jacobs, who doubled Chizik's salary. The hire drew howls among doubters who believed that Auburn needed a heavyweight to counter Alabama's Nick Saban. *The Montgomery Advertiser* joked that hundreds of people celebrated the hire—all in Tuscaloosa.

Chizik moved quickly to put his stamp on the Tigers, replacing Tuberville's staff with a group of all-star coordinators. The brightest among them were Trooper Taylor, a wily, gregarious recruiter who helped bring receiver Dez Bryant to Oklahoma State, and Gus Malzahn, a deeply religious Arkansas native regarded as the best offensive mind in college football after two years leading the nation's top attack at Tulsa.

Auburn's first season under Chizik was unspectacular; the team finished 7–5 and squeaked past Northwestern in the Outback Bowl. Then expectations went sky-high after he signed the No. 4 recruiting class, led by the most sought-after juco quarterback in the country, Cam Newton. That solidified Chizik as a force on the trail, and Malzahn used his Arkansas roots to pluck the No. 1 running back in the nation, Michael Dyer, from Little Rock Christian Academy.

Even with the rival Tide coming off a BCS title, those close to the program were certain that Chizik was about to become the elite coach Jacobs envisioned when he made the hire.

DYER ARRIVED AT Auburn in the summer of 2010, his dazzling smile and shoulder-shrugging humility belying a cast-iron kid who lost his father to a traffic accident at the age of 3 and was raised with the help of family friends. In a 2010 promotional video for the Tigers, he alluded to the way he used football to get back at the world: "When I run the ball, I'm always lowering my shoulders and thinking, Who's gonna go down this play?" He also conceded that he wasn't certain about Auburn until his best friend and teammate at Little Rock Christian, a 6'4", 250-pound tight end named Dakota Mosley, received a scholarship. "One day [Dakota] called me and said he wanted me to come to AU with him," Dyer recalls. "If he hadn't said something, I probably wouldn't have been here."

The two recruits hailed from the same state, but their worlds were vastly different. While Dyer walked through life angry about the death of his father, Mosley's dad was a constant presence in his son's life. Harrison Mosley, the backslapping owner of a commercial cleaning service, was so tethered to his son that he left his wife and two daughters in Fayetteville, Ark., so Dakota could play football at prestigious Little Rock Christian. Harrison took both Dakota and Dyer to college games and prospect camps together, "trying to build relationships for them," he says, which paid off when Malzahn made the push to sign both. Once again, Harrison tagged along, buying a condo in Auburn after Dakota and Dyer signed with the Tigers.

But the father couldn't shield his son from

YOU WON'T FIND SPICE ON THE SHELVES IN AUBURN ANYMORE, **BUT YOU CAN STILL BUY NEWER VERSIONS OF SYNTHETIC POT THAT WILL SLIP BY CURRENT TESTS.**

the temptations found on an SEC campus. Dakota got his first taste of Spice during a 2009 recruiting visit, when an older player at a football party gave him a hit. "You heard it didn't show up on a drug test," Dakota told *The Mag* in an exclusive interview this February. "It was just another thing to do to have fun that everybody else was doing." By the time he was officially on the team, the drug had become so openly used and widely available around Auburn that he shrugged off the newspaper article Petrone posted in his locker.

Then a late-summer practice brought his college football career to a halt before it even began. Mosley tore the labrum in his shoulder, requiring season-ending surgery. He was just a freshman, and a redshirt year would likely help his acclimation, but the further away he got from football, the more isolated he felt, filling his idle hours smoking Spice, not caring about the change coming over him.

He began walking around campus in unwashed Tigers gear pockmarked by cigarette burns. "I would go days sometimes without showering," he recalls. "The Spice just made you really not care about things. But at the same time, if you didn't have it, you'd have withdrawal symptoms, like almost instantly."

According to Mark Ryan of the Louisiana Poison Control Center, the drug's addictive potential comes from the fact that it affects the levels of serotonin and dopamine, neurotransmitters associated with happiness and pleasure. "It's like pain medication," he says. "After a while, you have to keep having more to achieve the same effects."

While Mosley wrestled with a growing addiction, Antonio Goodwin, a fellow freshman and four-star recruit, watched as some veterans smoked Spice before classes, film sessions, even practices, and he simply followed their lead. "The older players kept saying it's not gonna show up in your drug tests, so it kind of made you feel comfortable smoking," he recalls. Like Mosley, Goodwin noticed the drug altering his mindset and on-field performance. "As a football player, I felt I was starting to slip," he says. "Like passes I would normally catch in practice, I would drop. On long runs, I'd begin to slow down a bit. Problems breathing, stuff like that."

But Goodwin mostly was relegated to special-teams duty, and if the starters were feeling any ill effects from Spice, it wasn't evident. Through October of the 2010 season, the Tigers were 9-0 and had beaten three top-15 teams. Cam Newton was a Heisman favorite, and Chizik couldn't go anywhere in the Loveliest Village on the Plains without being mobbed by boosters who suddenly claimed they were behind him all along. Dyer, who'd posted 100 or more rushing yards in three games, was hailed as the second coming of Bo Jackson.

Buried beneath that success, though, was grave concern about a budding synthetic marijuana problem. An assistant coach on that 2010 squad, who asked to remain anonymous, told *The Mag* that Chizik addressed it in a midseason staff meeting: "He said, 'We have to get our arms around this thing,'" the coach says. Chizik also called a meeting to warn players, saying anyone who was caught using synthetic marijuana would be kicked off the team.

Petrone, the sports medicine director, told *The Mag* this March that he did not approach any student-athletes about Spice use and that none spoke to him. Nor was he aware that Redwood Toxicology Laboratory, a drug-testing lab in Santa Rosa, Calif., had widely announced in July 2010 that it had the first urine test to detect JWH-018. Dominion Diagnostics in North Kingstown, R.I., nationally publicized its Spice test two months later. According to a survey of SEC schools by *The Birmingham News* in 2012, Alabama implemented a test for Spice in fall 2010.

Petrone, however, approached Auburn's drug-testing vendor, Aegis Sciences Corp. in Nashville, about creating a test. Aegis told him it would take three to six months, meaning the test likely wouldn't be ready until after the season was over.

BY LATE OCTOBER 2010, with the Tigers undefeated, Harrison Mosley was completely caught up in the mood on his son's campus: the electricity of Toomer's Corner on Saturday nights, the growing celebrity of Newton and the media hordes descending on Auburn. Having never played beyond high school football, Harrison was seduced by being so close to the program. He could even be found on the sideline during practices, cheering on other parents' sons while drifting apart from his own.

He took players out to meals, eager to soak up all the details of the locker room, and he was a regular at the bar of the Hotel at Auburn University, an elegant campus guest house, where he would give the Tigers' sales pitch to parents of recruits. He claims coaches spurred him on, particularly Malzahn, whom he still holds in starry-eyed regard.

"They asked us [parents] to go see players who were close to where we lived and visit with them and visit with their families and do those things," he told *The Mag*. (A representative for the university denies that Mosley had any official role in recruiting.)

Harrison spent enough time around the program that he was eventually introduced to synthetic marijuana. The first time he heard about Spice was around September 2010, when he ran into one of Dakota's friends at a local barbecue joint and asked why his son seemed depressed and upset despite the team's promising start. The player disclosed that Dakota was part of a tightly knit circle of Spice smokers who held regular parties at Dyer's apartment. Harrison went straight to Malzahn.

Although Malzahn declined to discuss the meeting directly with *The Mag*, he issued a comment through a university representative, saying that the two men discussed Dakota's depression, not Spice. Whatever the case, the coach's promise to address Dakota's troubles relieved Harrison.

But Spice was too strong for Dakota to overcome. One evening, he remembers sitting in his dorm room after smoking Spice and "feeling like I was in a cartoon land or something. I felt like I wasn't here on earth anymore. It was wild. It was crazy."

Later, as a result of smoking Spice, the teen began having suicidal thoughts. Malzahn arranged a counseling session, but Dakota skipped it. "I really didn't know which way to turn, because I didn't understand what my son had gotten himself into," Harrison says. So the 43-year-old made a decision: He was going to smoke Spice himself.

At a head shop nestled in an off-campus shopping mall, Harrison bought a few silvery packages, then went to his rented condo and rolled a cigarette. Three puffs later, "my heart rate was double. For three or four hours, I sat in my living room gripping the recliner arms, trying to decide if I should go to the emergency room, 'cause I really thought that I was gonna die."

SUSANNAH BRYAN/SUN SENTINEL/MCT/GETTY IMAGES

A WASTED OPPORTUNITY Harrison Mosley moved his son Dakota across Arkansas to play at prestigious Little Rock Christian Academy, then followed him to Auburn, where he didn't protect the teenager from a growing drug problem.

The next day, Harrison raced to see Malzahn. "You've got a serious problem if your players are doing this," he claims he told the coach. "It's the scariest thing I've ever done. You'd be better off handing out bales of marijuana."

IN EARLY NOVEMBER 2010, as Auburn prepared for a weak nonconference home game against Chattanooga, Chizik and Malzahn were faced with higher-profile problems. ESPN and *The New York Times* had just reported that Newton's father, Cecil, had shopped his son around the SEC for as much as $180,000 before Newton committed to Auburn over Mississippi State. NCAA investigators launched a probe that included combing through bank records, tax returns and email accounts for evidence of foul play in the recruitment process.

Reporters camped out around the Tigers' buses before the players left for the team hotel, asking Newton about the burgeoning scandal. "I didn't do anything wrong," he said, shrugging his shoulders. (The NCAA would find no evidence of wrongdoing in his case.)

Newton and the Tigers thrashed Chattanooga 62-24 and continued rolling with wins against Georgia and an epic 24-point comeback at Alabama. Dyer ended the season with 1,093 rushing yards, breaking the school record for a freshman set by Bo Jackson in 1982. On Dec. 4, Auburn drubbed South Carolina in the SEC title game to cap an undefeated season.

Meanwhile, in the quiet before the national title game, Dakota's drug habits finally caught up to him. On Dec. 20, 2010, he failed a drug test for regular marijuana and the prescription tranquilizer benzodiazepine. An official memo that circulated to Chizik and Jacobs, the Auburn athletic director, triggered a rash of penalties, among them an automatic suspension and a call to Harrison, who says that the notification—from Petrone—was his first indication that Dakota wasn't responding to the athletic department's efforts.

While Dakota stayed back at school, Harrison attended the BCS title game on Jan. 10, 2011, in Glendale, Ariz., with Dakota's stepmother. "I was there to support Michael Dyer," he says. "I mean, I was part of Mike's life. I was there to support the other kids who I was close to and who meant a lot to me. I was there to support the coaches who were having a good year."

Under the lights at the BCS game, with the score tied at 19 and the clock ticking down in the fourth quarter, Newton handed the ball to Dyer, who ran straight into a tackler, waiting for a whistle. But Dyer realized his knee wasn't down and kept running until he'd chewed up 37 yards to Oregon's 23-yard line. Three plays later, he gained another 16 yards, setting up the game-winning field goal.

Dyer, who was named offensive MVP, received the lion's share of the credit for Auburn's first national title in more than half a century. But the Tigers defense was just as stout. One unexpected standout was Mike McNeil, a junior safety from Mobile, Ala., who was raised by his mother and grandfather, Pro Bowl receiver Clifton McNeil. Mike notched a team-high 14 tackles, 12 of them solo hits, and had every reason to believe he could follow in his grandfather's footsteps to the NFL.

While Dyer and McNeil shined on a national stage, Dakota watched them on TV back at his apartment in Auburn, passing the hours by smoking Spice.

ON JAN. 24, 2011, two weeks after the championship game and the beginning of Auburn's spring semester, Aegis informed Auburn that a test for JWH-018 was ready. Players on the 2010 team who were not enrolled in the spring or had exhausted their eligibility were no longer part of Auburn's drug-testing pool. "I think we were one of the first, if not the first, schools in the SEC to test for it," Jacobs says in defense of the timing.

On Jan. 27, Petrone gave the test to 97 student-athletes and discovered five positives, including one from Mosley and another from an unidentified player on the football team, according to records made available to *The Mag* by the athletic department. Over the next six months, Petrone administered the test another 702 times and found 13 new cases, 10 more of them from members of the football squad.

One of the Tigers in that group was Shaun Kitchens, a 19-year-old wide receiver from College Park, Ga. The freshman's mother, Kimberly Harkness, worked three jobs to get her son to Auburn, and she did it while caring for two other children, one of whom has special needs. The day she dropped her son off on campus was, she told *The Mag*, the proudest of her life. "I worked my ass off to get him to this point," she remembers saying to one of the coaches. "Now I'm turning him over to you."

But in late February 2011, she received a call from assistant Trooper Taylor, who had brought Kitchens to his office to inform Harkness that her son was skipping classes and arriving late to team meetings. "Why, Shaun?" she recalls asking him. "You worked so hard for this. Why?"

Kitchens mumbled an apology, but Harkness says her son was usually so focused and determined. "I couldn't put my finger on it," she says. "Something wasn't right." The subject of his failed drug test, Harkness says, never came up.

photograph by NANCY NEWBERRY

Jacobs, a folksy, confident executive who played offensive tackle for the Tigers in the early '80s, told *The Mag* that the athletic department's choice not to inform athletes' parents about the positive tests was a matter of legal necessity because the drug wasn't punishable by the school's banned substance list until August 2011, when it did start notifying parents.

In the seven-month window between when Auburn began testing for Spice and officially enforcing its ban, the program was left with a complicated task: interpreting not only its own drug policies but those of the NCAA's as well. The 2010-11 NCAA banned drug list begins with the following statement in bold type: "There is no complete list of banned drug examples!!" Auburn's 2010 drug policy called for the banning of drugs on the NCAA's banned substances list, including a category called street drugs, and also allowed the school to expand the definition to include "related compounds." While the NCAA listed marijuana as a street drug (no specific mention of synthetic marijuana), it stated: "Any substance that is chemically related to the class of banned drugs is also banned!" JWH-018 was chemically designed to mimic marijuana's effect on cannabinoid receptors in the brain, but Auburn's legal staff ultimately concluded that Spice was not a related compound of, or chemically related to, regular marijuana. "In 2010 and early 2011, using synthetic marijuana was not necessarily a transgression of our policy," says C. Randall Clark, a member of the university's drug-testing advisory committee.

The school deemed that the athletic department couldn't discipline students caught using Spice in the same manner as those caught using regular marijuana or cocaine. That meant no parental notification or loss of playing time. "There wasn't anything we could do except educate our athletes," Jacobs says.

THE FIRST TIME Mosley learned that he'd failed Auburn's new drug test for Spice, in February 2011, he was petrified. "I was scared that I was gonna have to call my parents again and tell them that I'd failed another drug test and I was gonna get kicked off the team," he told *The Mag*.

Actually, nothing happened, even after he'd failed six more drug tests by March 9. Petrone recalled telling him each time "the facts about synthetic marijuana, how it's made ... that it's dangerous because it is a synthetic substance."

JUDGMENT DAYS In June 2012, Goodwin (top) received 15 years for first-degree armed robbery. Nearly a year later, McNeil pleaded guilty to first-degree robbery, and he must serve at least three years.

His lectures hit halfway home. "It was kind of weird," Dakota says. "It was like you could get in trouble for doing it, but you couldn't get in trouble. It almost seemed like it was okay."

On the morning of March 9, 2011, after he was given the seventh straight drug test he would fail, Mosley went to Chizik's office to talk about his future. Chizik declined to discuss the meeting with *The Mag*, as did Malzahn, who was also present, but Cassie Arner, an athletic department spokeswoman, described it as a pep talk: "Coach Chizik set very specific targets that Mr. Mosley had to meet if he wanted to play spring ball," she said in an interview with *The Mag* this March. Those targets included staying clean and counseling.

Harrison Mosley, however, recalled it differently. According to him, Malzahn told Harrison after the session that they "had worked it out" and that Chizik was putting Dakota back on the team. Dakota recalled being told he was "probably going to get back on the team."

The particulars may be less interesting than the timing of the meeting. Text messages from March 9, 2011, between Harrison and his son show that Dakota was scheduled to meet an investigator from the NCAA later that very day. According to the Mosleys' texts, the investigator wanted to know about recruiting trips that Dakota took to Auburn in 2009, as well as a photo showing him clutching stacks of bills wrapped in rubber bands. Harrison said the cash was money that his son got from a car sale. But the texts, which Mosley furnished to *The Mag*, suggest that Harrison was concerned about how it would be perceived by the NCAA.

"Did you ever visit with the NCAA lady?" Harrison asked his son on March 9, 2011.

"Yeah I did," Dakota answered.

"So what was said?"

"Just asked about the trips."

"What about the picture?"

"Just told them it was from my mom selling her car."

"That was it?" Harrison asked. He then followed up with, "Call me for a minute."

There is no evidence that Dakota's session with Chizik had anything to do with the NCAA meeting scheduled later that day. Dakota, in fact, says it was never discussed. He ended that day feeling upbeat. Despite all of his positive tests for Spice, the program was going to stick by him.

THE NEXT EVENING, on March 10, 2011, with spring break about to start, Michael Dyer waved the smoke out of his eyes and tried to focus on the question: *"Can we have your gun?"*

He was staring back at Mosley, Goodwin, Kitchens and sophomore receiver DeAngelo Benton, who was hosting them at his off-campus apartment. They were watching an NBA game, passing around a Spice joint and complaining about how broke they were. As the result of his suspension for drug use, Mosley wasn't getting his monthly stipend from Auburn. According to Goodwin, he was receiving $350, but a couple of days before, Newton and other Auburn prospects had gone through pro day. The NFL-caliber money they stood to make was a major topic among younger players.

After he and his friends finished watching the game, Dyer announced he was leaving. According to Benton's subsequent police statement, Mosley, Goodwin and Kitchens did the same, but not before "pop[ping] some kind of pill." Benton had his back to the group when he heard one of them say on the way out, "I'm tired of being broke. I need to hit a lick."

Dyer, who turned down interview requests from *The Mag*, later testified in court that he wasn't back in his apartment long before Goodwin paid a visit to ask for Dyer's .45-caliber handgun. But in an exclusive interview with *The Mag*, Goodwin disputed that account, claiming that Dyer got the weapon himself and carried it to another party, this one at an apartment shared by Mike McNeil and future Kansas City Chiefs corner Neiko Thorpe.

FROM TOP: VASHA HUNT/POPE LUKA-AUBURN NEWS/AP IMAGES; ALBERT CESARE/POPE LUKA-AUBURN NEWS/AP IMAGES

JACOBS (FAR RIGHT) WELCOMED BACK MALZAHN IN DECEMBER, THIS TIME AS HEAD COACH, **AFTER PAYING $7.5 MILLION TO GET RID OF CHIZIK.**

"When we got to Neiko's house, there was a little bit more smoking and drinking that took place," Goodwin says. "We were around more females, and, whatever, it was like a party scene. We were chilling, and Mike Dyer had [the] gun on his waist. Dakota asked to see it."

Thorpe later told police that when he followed Dakota upstairs, he witnessed players passing around a gun and discussing "something about a trailer."

IT'S EASY TO get lost in Conway Acres, a trailer park on the outskirts of campus filled with identical, connecting cul-de-sacs. The manufactured homes are stacked like dominoes, with similarly trellised porches, fresh-cut lawns and pickups parked outside.

Mosley had been to Trailer 437 about a week earlier to visit an acquaintance, Jacob Tyler Smith, and saw a small Walmart safe nestled in one of the bedrooms. Smith also mentioned to Mosley that he'd just received an $850 check from a betting site. McNeil later told police that Mosley decided to "hit" that particular "lick" because "his friend had some money." Goodwin insisted, "None of us originally planned on doing anything." Kitchens vaguely recalled, "Some other folks I was in the car with decided to ride over to the trailer." Mosley said robbing the trailer was Kitchens' idea.

Whatever the case, all were still stoned when they jumped into McNeil's silver Chrysler 300 sedan just before midnight on March 10, 2011, for the trip to Conway Acres. McNeil took it as far as the access road, then got out so Mosley could take over as the getaway driver.

The trailer was lit up with several people watching a movie inside, among them a mechanical engineering student named Don Rhoades. When Rhoades heard a knock, he thought it was another friend who'd promised to stop by. He opened his door to find himself facing the barrel of a gun.

"[McNeil] pushed me down on the couch and pretty much got on top of me," Rhoades testified in court. One of the girls, Ingrid Capps, ran off to hide in a bathroom, only to be forced back by an intruder. A few minutes later, one of the robbers emerged from a bedroom with a black safe. "We got what we came here for," Capps recalls him saying as they fled. (Smith, Dakota's acquaintance, was not present.)

Peering out at the taillights of the Chrysler disappearing into the dark, a shaken Capps called 911 on the iPhone she'd cleverly stashed in the couch. Just as the car reached the main avenue outside the development, two Auburn police officers responding to the call turned on their cruisers' patrol lights. Mosley slowed to a crawl and pulled into the gravel entrance of a horse farm. The police rolled to a stop beside the Chrysler, emerging with their guns drawn, and ordered the men out of the car. A third officer arrived at the same time and kept his duty rifle trained on the scene.

As the four hapless Tigers stood on the roadside, the police found the black safe along with a .45-caliber handgun and a BB gun. Asked to identify himself, Goodwin replied, "We're Auburn football players."

The next morning, Chizik awoke to the news that four Tigers were each being held at Lee County Detention Center on $511,000 bail. He huddled with his staff and released a statement expressing shock and outrage. "While we realize the legal process will run its course and these young men have a right for their case to be heard, playing for Auburn University is an honor and a privilege. It is not a right. I am extremely disappointed and embarrassed by the actions of these individuals."

After the statement was released, he picked up the phone in his office and started calling the parents of the ousted players. Harrison Mosley recalls the head coach telling him, "I don't like the circumstances I have to call under. I feel like Dakota has stabbed me in the back."

A TRIP TO Conway Acres this March revealed that all evidence of the crime scene has been swept away. The mobile home on Lot 437 is gone; just a rectangular patch of crabgrass where it used to sit remains.

Any evidence of the Chizik era has also been wiped clean. After winning a national championship, the 2010 team returned only six starters. Chizik presided over an 8-5 season in 2011 and a 3-9 disaster in 2012. Jacobs, in a letter sent to Auburn boosters on Nov. 25, 2012, admitted that the man he'd once insisted was perfect for the job had been a poor choice for head coach. "I regret that the Auburn family, and especially our season-ticket holders and donors, have had to endure a frustrating and difficult season. You expect and deserve better," he wrote.

On a drizzly Alabama morning this February, Jacobs looked outside his window at the cranes heaving concrete pilings for a new parking garage outside Jordan-Hare Stadium and considered the question that has hovered over his athletic department since the night of the robbery two years ago.

Could his program have been more proactive about confronting synthetic marijuana use during its national championship season?

Sipping a Diet Coke, the AD didn't go into specifics but rather addressed the big picture. "We did all we could do to educate our student-athletes until us and the testing lab could understand exactly what we were dealing with, I think just like the rest of the campus and the nation was trying to figure out," he said. The slow-moving world of college drug testing, Jacobs pointed out, is no match for the fast-moving world of designer drugs.

But whether the program could've done more to impede the downfall of the four former players is an argument that came into sharp relief in April 2012, when Goodwin was the first to face a jury. Over three days, he heard Dyer testify about Spice use on the team, and the students from the trailer recounted their horror at being robbed. But presiding judge Christopher J. Hughes, an Auburn alum, limited Lauryn Lauderdale, Goodwin's attorney, and her line of questioning until she felt calling Chizik would have little use. "Auburn is not on trial here," he'd said earlier in her cross-examination.

The jury took 45 minutes to convict Goodwin. In June 2012, Hughes sentenced the once-promising receiver to 15 years in prison.

During a phone interview this March from Kilby Correctional Facility in Montgomery, Ala., Goodwin took full responsibility for his actions. "I'm not trying to hide," he said. But he also has had plenty of time already to consider how his experience at Auburn could have turned out differently. "It wasn't hard to find out we were all smoking," he said. "It got to the point where players were showing up to the meetings high, and the performance at practice wasn't as good as it was at the beginning of the season. It took a toll on a lot of people, a lot of players. But we were a winning team getting

E:60

FOR MORE ON AUBURN'S BATTLE AGAINST SPICE, *CATCH THE E:60 SEASON PREMIERE ON APRIL 23 AT 7 P.M. ET.*

recognition with a superstar quarterback. So [the coaches] tried to keep stuff like that under wraps. You don't want it to leak out to the media. You try to ... hide it."

AS THE THREE other Conway Acres cases wind through the Lee County courthouse, there is certain to be more discussion about whether Spice led to the events of March 11, 2011. On April 8, McNeil pleaded guilty to first-degree robbery and will serve a minimum of three years in prison, while Mosley and Kitchens await trial.

Meanwhile, Dyer asked for and was granted a release from Auburn in January 2012 after his second straight 1,000-yard rushing season. *The Mag* has learned that he failed six tests for synthetic marijuana between February and June 2011, and after Auburn started punishing offenders in August 2011, he failed two more tests. A third positive for regular marijuana on Nov. 29, 2011, three days after the finale against Alabama, resulted in an indefinite suspension, which prompted his request for a release.

Malzahn, who left Auburn after the 2011 season and resurrected Arkansas State with its first bowl win as an FBS school, gave Dyer a second chance with the Red Wolves. In return, the former star created more controversy after he was cited for going 96 mph in a 70 mph zone, and an unloaded pistol was found in the trunk of his car. Malzahn released his prized recruit. Now Dyer is studying at a small Arkansas Christian college, a once-likely first-round NFL draft pick reduced to a question mark with two years of college eligibility remaining.

As for Malzahn, the 47-year-old is back at Auburn as the head coach, entrusted with rebuilding the program he helped revive just three seasons ago. Jacobs spent $7.5 million to get rid of Chizik (who has worked briefly as an analyst for ESPN) in the hopes that Malzahn's high-scoring spread offense will restore the winning ways of a program that has taken the biggest tumble of any BCS champion.

But more than wins and losses, Malzahn's job now is to try to stabilize the fragile foundation of a reeling program. Answering questions from reporters after a spring practice in late March, he had this to say: "When I first got the job, it was evident we had some players with mental scars. But it's a new day." ■

BLUNT FACTS

CLEARING THE AIR ABOUT SPICE

In the reporting of "Coming Down," which first ran April 4 on ESPN.com, The Mag requested drug-testing records from Auburn, as well as interviews with athletic director Jay Jacobs, coach Gus Malzahn, former coach Gene Chizik and sports medicine director Joseph Petrone. [Access to Jacobs and Petrone was granted.] The story has since been widely debated, and new information has contradicted some of Auburn's statements to The Mag. Here are answers to FAQs about Auburn and Spice. —SHAUN ASSAEL

When did Spice become illegal in Alabama? On April 29, 2010, then-governor Bob Riley signed a bill that made Spice illegal to possess or sell; that bill went into effect July 1, 2010. "There was a huge public perception that this stuff was a legal high when it wasn't," says Barry Matson, deputy director of the Alabama District Attorneys Association, which helped draft the bill. On March 1, 2011, the Alabama Department of Public Health added Spice to its controlled substance list, making it a Schedule I drug, the same as cocaine and heroin.

When was the first test made available? Auburn says it began screening as soon as a test was available to the school on Jan. 24, 2011—two weeks after the BCS title game. It chose Aegis Sciences Corp., a Nashville company that runs Auburn's drug-testing program, to create that test. Six months earlier, in July 2010, Redwood Toxicology Laboratory of Santa Rosa, Calif., debuted a urine test for JWH-018. Two months later, Dominion Diagnostics of North Kingstown, R.I., also unveiled a Spice screen. Both tests were widely publicized by outlets such as Reuters, CBSNews.com and The Street.

Did programs test for Spice before Auburn? Yes. According to a survey of SEC schools done by *The Birmingham News* in July 2012, Alabama began testing for the drug in the fall of 2010. Auburn told the paper it started testing in August 2011. In an interview with *The Mag* this past February, Auburn officials said they began testing players in January 2011. The first public report of a player being punished for a positive Spice test was in October 2011, when LSU suspended three players for a game.

Did Auburn notify players' parents of failed Spice tests, and were there legal obligations or restrictions in doing so? Auburn officials told *The Mag* that they were legally barred from notifying parents when a student-athlete 18 or older failed a test before August 2011, when Spice was added to the school's banned substances list. But a player's father anonymously told Rivals site AuburnSports.com that he was notified by the school of his son's failed test in the spring of 2011, months before Auburn maintains that it was legally allowed to do so. The university rebutted that report to *The Mag*, insisting that "there was no notification from the sports medicine department or athletic director prior to August 2011."

Auburn says that of more than 2,500 tests for Spice since August 2011, only three have come back positive. Does that mean the synthetic marijuana problem is solved? That stat is accurate, but in the six months before that August, the athletic department administered 799 tests and found 18 positives, including 12 from football players, according to documents supplied to *The Mag* by Auburn. The issue for all schools is that it is prohibitively expensive to routinely use tests that keep pace with the hundreds of new cannabinoids now being sold.

photograph by ADAM VOORHES

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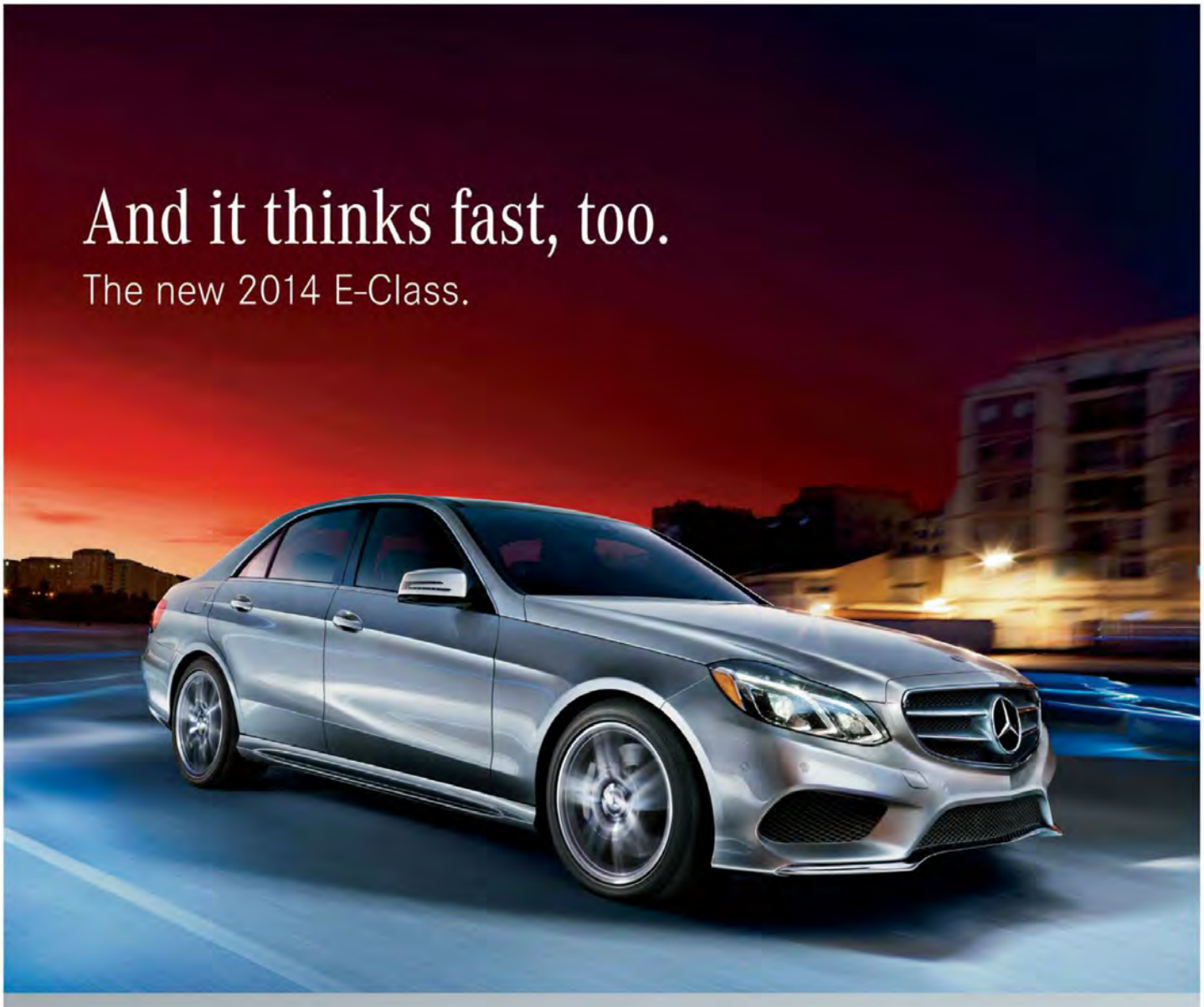

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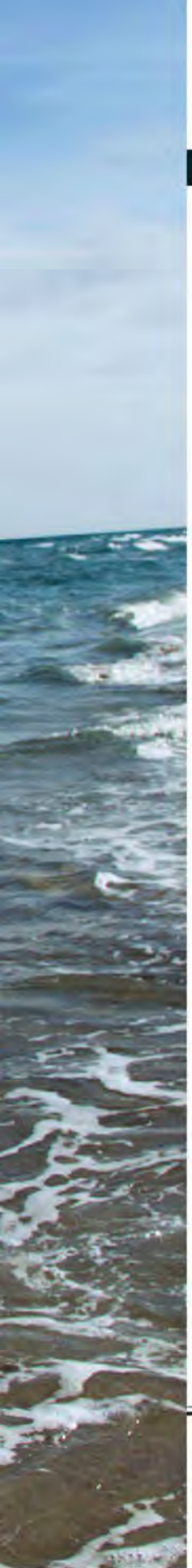
NFL DRAFT PREVIEW

IN A LEAGUE of control freaks, one event humbles them all. Just ask Deion Sanders, a man who was not exactly wracked by uncertainty during his Hall of Fame career. "This was my moment!" he said of his 1989 draft day, experienced in the company of Andrea Kremer. "But I had a lot of anxiety because I had no control." No one does. Not the players sitting in the green room, or the decision makers strategizing in their war rooms, or us amateur forecasters dissecting Mel's draft board from our living rooms. Everything known—from the combine to scouting reports to the rumor mill—pales in comparison to what's not known. Whether Tyrann Mathieu has conquered his demons. Whether the Browns have finally learned from the many errors of their drafting ways. Or whether the next Neon Deion is out there somewhere, waiting for his phone to ring, humbled, if just for one day.

DAVID BANKS/AP IMAGES



NFL DRAFT 2013

HI, MY NAME IS ~~HONEY BADGER~~ TYRANN

Tyrann Mathieu is out of rehab and living alone, trying to convince himself (and NFL GMs) that he's more than his old habits and nicknames.

by ELI SASLOW

photographs by JOHN LOOMIS

TYRANN MATHIEU
CB | LSU

GOOD FIT
PATRIOTS

ROUND
03

PICK
91

In the past three years, Alfonzo Dennard, Ryan Mallett and Brandon Spikes had baggage that hurt their draft stock, and all were picked by the Pats. Bill Belichick takes chances on troubled talent. —MEL KIPER JR.

FORCING THE ISSUE

Among recent defensive POY winners, Mathieu forced the most career fumbles—by far.

XXXX XXXX XXX	TYRANN MATHIEU 2011 | LSU
XXXX	REY MAUALUGA 2008 | USC
XXX	NDAMUKONG SUH 2009 | NEBRASKA
XX	MANTI TE'O 2012 | NOTRE DAME
X	PATRICK PETERSON 2010 | LSU

TYRANN MATHIEU HAS TRIED A DOZEN FORMS OF THERAPY SINCE DRUGS DERAILED HIS LIFE,

but on this morning he decides the best antidote to temptation is a long walk alone. He arrives at Pompano Beach in southeast Florida just after sunrise and parks his car in an empty lot. He pulls a hooded sweatshirt over his famous shock of yellow hair and tightens the waistband on his mesh shorts. Then he kicks his shoes into the sand and starts walking barefoot toward the surf.

The idea of a beach walk started as a recommendation from his athletic trainer—another drill meant to prepare him for the 2013 NFL draft, another psychological exercise he initially dismissed as "pointless." But as draft day nears and his anxiety mounts, Mathieu relies on the walks as part of his routine, an escape between timed 40-yard dashes and interviews with NFL executives who want to rehash his mistakes. He has never been particularly good at dealing with stress, its effects already reducing him from a 2011 Heisman Trophy finalist to a recovering addict with an arrest record. The walks are part of his rehab, what he calls his Phase 2, and he says they have helped him stay sober for three months and counting.

"Walking alone, just thinking—that's treatment, man," he says. "That's the most comforting rehab I've known."

It is more comforting than the family counseling sessions at LSU, the group therapy in a converted fraternity house or the inpatient rehab in Texas where counselors checked his toiletries each week to make sure they were alcohol-free. More comforting than the boxing lessons he started, hoping to release anger. More comforting than the therapeutic rap songs he has begun writing, trying to make sense of his complicated life. More comforting than talking on the phone every night with his sponsor, a 40-year-old recovering addict who cautions Mathieu to remember: "This is your life. An addict is never truly cured."

It's more comforting, on the best days, than lying on a couch and lighting a blunt—the habit that caused so many problems in the first place.

Mathieu's path on Pompano Beach is always the same: a mile down the sand to a black-and-white lighthouse and a mile back, with his head down and his breathing steady. He listens to the cry of the gulls. He smells the salt and sand. He walks on the edge of the water and lets the waves crash against the partial tattoos of lightning bolts and Bible verses on his legs, which he started at LSU but left unfinished, like so much else.

The goal on his walks is to let stress slip away and to find clarity for what his sponsor calls the big questions. Does he like the person he is becoming? Is he continuing to make his recovery a priority? Can he manage his stress and stay sober even as the NFL draft nears and the scrutiny increases, with his career and his reputation again in the balance?

Sometimes the answers come to him easily on the beach.

Other times he reaches the lighthouse and keeps walking.

HE MOVED to Florida by himself five months before the NFL draft, hoping to scrub his life clean of temptation, and all that remains is a Spartan daily schedule that hangs on his wall: A beach run or walk after dawn. Some lifting at the gym before lunch. A deep-tissue massage in the early afternoon. Then a two-hour workout with a training group of former college players in the Florida heat.

By 4 p.m. Mathieu is usually back at his antiseptic apartment in Delray Beach, a one-bedroom stucco in a gated community of retirees, with manicured palm trees and a swimming pool. The place is filled with white New Englanders who are there for the winter. He has yet to meet any of them. "I think they might be scared of me or something," he says.

One afternoon in early spring, Mathieu returns to the apartment and drops his workout gear on the floor. His agent found the place for him and rented it fully stocked. There are paintings of seashells on the walls and pink and purple beach towels hanging on a rack by the entrance. "I never use any of this," Mathieu says. "It's like being in a hotel." He has never lived by himself, so he asks his girlfriend at LSU to email him grocery lists of foods that are easy to

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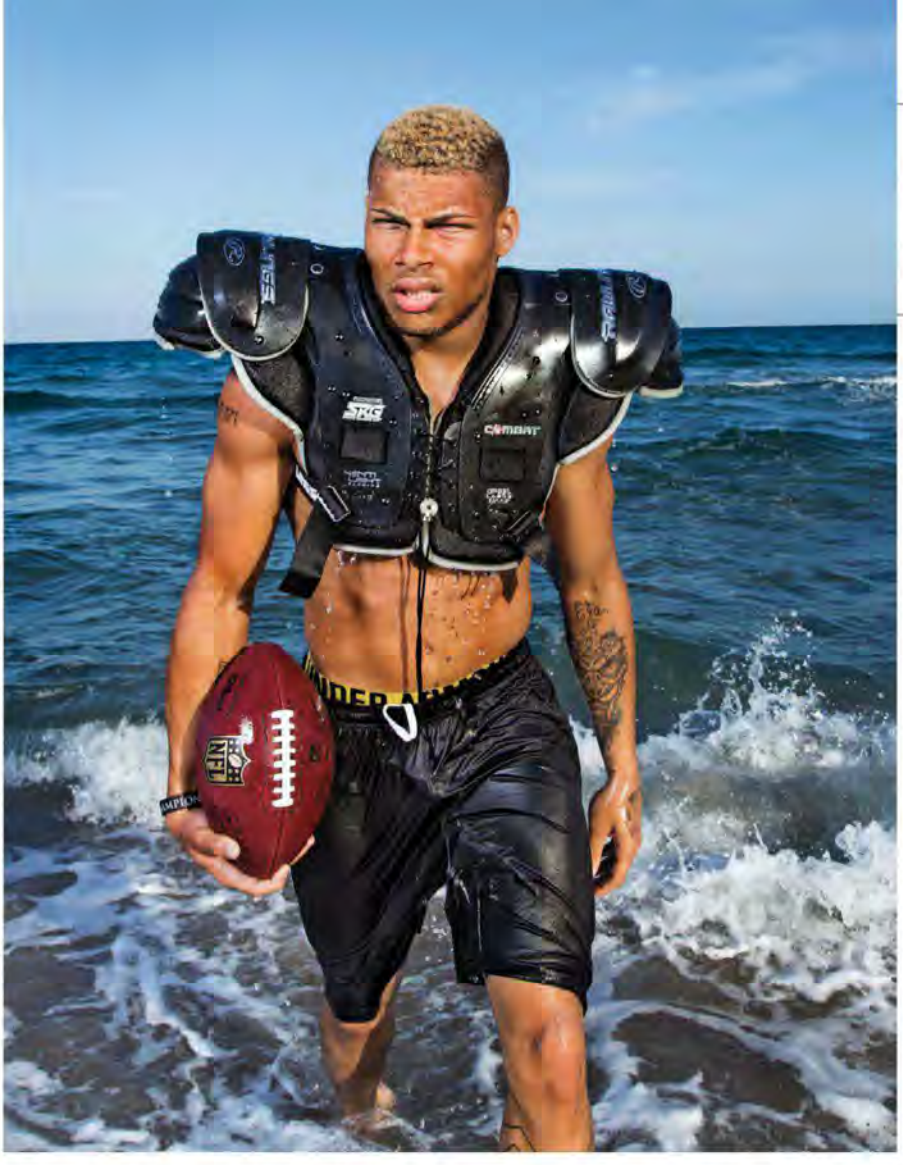

"I like trying to understand why things happen," Mathieu says. "I want to know the root causes."

prepare. Now the fridge is filled with frozen mashed potatoes, a 50-pack of hot dogs, Kraft cheese, peanut butter and Popsicles.

His main problems in Florida are loneliness and boredom. Counselors and therapists instructed him to end relationships with people who added to his stress and triggered his addiction, which turned out to be most of them, so he has changed his cellphone number twice in the past three months to avoid old high school and college friends. He avoids text messages from the mother who gave him up for adoption a lifetime ago and the uncle who took him in. He's tired, he says, of the family members who have repeatedly disappointed him and want only his validation and time, if not his money. He's done giving at his own expense. "All that drama and negativity just drags on me," he says.

One of his old college teammates, quarterback Jordan Jefferson, is also training in Delray Beach, but Mathieu has kept his distance. (Jefferson, Mathieu and two other ex-Tigers were arrested in October 2012 on drug-related charges.) Mathieu prefers to pass the time alone by obsessively washing his car, even though he rarely drives it. The clubs of South Beach are less than an hour away, and Mathieu thinks it is too tempting to have his car nearby at night. "I'd rather be trapped here without having to think about it," he says, so after dark he lends the car to his agent's assistant, who drives it away, then brings it back each morning before Mathieu's first workout.

When the assistant leaves with the car, Mathieu grabs a Popsicle from his fridge and turns the flat-screen TV to the History Channel. He has always been contemplative—sometimes, according to his counselors at LSU, too pensive for his own good. Other college kids make their mistakes and move on; Mathieu would obsess about blown coverages and light a blunt. Regret became self-hatred and anger, which became depression, which became days of sleeping 14 hours and missing class to smoke weed in his apartment with the shades drawn.

"I like trying to understand why things happen," he says. "I want to know the root causes."

The show on TV is about a Civil War general charged with treason. Mathieu grabs the remote and punches up the volume.

"What the hell?" Mathieu says. "What made him do that? What made this dude go wrong?"

MATHIEU STARTED to go wrong just when he was starting to realize his potential.

He had played well as a backup cornerback for LSU during his freshman season, and he returned the next year as the presumptive leader of the team's secondary. He changed his jersey to No. 7, which his best friend and former teammate Patrick Peterson, an All-American, had worn the year before, and dyed his hair yellow because his sister said it would give him swagger. He was 5'9" but physically reckless, and he led LSU in tackles and forced turnovers. Teammates and fans began to call him the Honey Badger, after a small and ferocious animal from Asia and Africa, but Mathieu hated the name. He asked people to call him by one of his old monikers, Tyrannosaurus Rex or Mr. Chaos.

But what he had gained in notoriety he had lost in control: Honey Badger became a drink named in his honor at the New Orleans bars and a T-shirt sold at tailgates, and Mr. Chaos came to mean something else. Chaos was the high school friends who started road-tripping to LSU to watch him play, then stayed on his couches all week, playing video games until dawn and filling the apartment with the haze of Black & Mild cigars. It was 25,000 new Twitter followers every week and an ex-girlfriend posting old pictures of him naked. It was infighting among his family members as they told their contradictory stories about Mathieu's upbringing to the media—a father in prison for second-degree murder who suddenly wanted to offer advice, a mother who had given him up as

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MR. DANGEROUS

In 2011 Mathieu had the highest punt-return average among players in BCS conferences (minimum of 20 returns)

a baby and now hoped for forgiveness, an uncle who had adopted him and wanted more credit, Mathieu says.

What resulted for Mathieu was a season of contradictions: He led LSU to an SEC championship one week, then met in secret with a school psychologist at an empty Tiger Stadium the next. He went back home to New Orleans to play for a national title and spent 14 hours a day sleeping in the team's hotel, too depressed to see visitors in the days before the game. "I don't even want to play," he told Sydni Russell, his girlfriend, who was then a freshman at LSU.

"He was lonely in his head. That's the best way to describe it," says Shelly Mullenix, the athletic department's director of wellness, who counseled Mathieu that year. "I've seen emptiness before, and that was it. Part of him was still a lost and lonely kid."

Marijuana had always been his favorite coping mechanism. He smoked it for the first time with his cousins when he was 13, two weeks after Hurricane Katrina wasted his house with four feet of water and forced him to relocate with family to Humble, Texas. He smoked some more during high school back in New Orleans, after LSU explained that its scholarship offer was contingent on Mathieu's raising his GPA. He kept on smoking as he transitioned to college, because LSU coach Les Miles had a reputation for smelling the alcohol in a player's sweat during practice, which made marijuana the players' drug of choice. Sometimes they smoked weed proper; other times they smoked synthetic marijuana, a blend of herbs and chemicals. Mathieu smoked whichever was around.

"A blunt, a few friends, just chilling out—that was a good Saturday for me," Mathieu says.

He failed his first drug test in July 2011 and failed another in the fall. Both tests found traces of synthetic marijuana in his system, and they cost him a one-game suspension. After the season ended with a loss in the national championship game, he started smoking three or four times a week, he says. If he had a drug test scheduled for Friday, he would stop smoking on Tuesday and hope the drugs cleared his system. He passed some and failed others. He didn't really care.

LSU placed him on probation in the spring, and for a few months he stayed clean. Then he returned to school for his junior year—as a preseason All-American, a Heisman frontrunner and a likely LSU captain—and smoked on his first day off.

His brother, Tyrone, warned, "Stop acting like you're invincible."

Mullenix, his counselor, warned, "Watching you is like seeing a train wreck in progress."

Russell, his girlfriend, warned, "You have God-given talent, and you are smacking God in the face."

Mathieu told Russell to stop worrying about his drug tests. "What," he said, "are they going to kick me out?"

MILES CALLED him into the training room on Aug. 10 at 5:30 a.m.

"You're done," he said.

Three people were in the room—Miles, Mullenix and Mathieu. Nobody was angry. All of them were hurt. Miles had always liked Mathieu, sometimes inviting him to have dinner in his office on Thursday nights, even when Mathieu was suspended or on probation. Mullenix thought he was "troubled but genuinely big-hearted," and his dismissal felt in some ways like defeat. Mathieu mumbled and cried and apologized. "I did this to myself," he said again and again. "I did this to myself."

Then just as the meeting was ending: "So what do I do?"

He waited until his roommates left for practice, then returned to his apartment to pack. The uncle who raised him and his brother drove from New Orleans to help. Several Division I-AA coaches called to recruit him, descending like "piranhas ready to use him," Mullenix says. A few hours after he was kicked out of school, the Heisman Trophy finalist packed his boxes in the car and drove 130 miles west to visit McNeese State University. "Like going from the Marriott to a Motel 8," says his brother, Tyrone Mathieu Jr. "We were walking around in a haze." They stayed for an hour and drove back to New Orleans.

Mathieu spent the next two days at home, eliminating bad options. He couldn't go back to LSU, at least not right away, and he couldn't play on the team for at least a year. He couldn't yet declare for the NFL draft, not just days after his reputation had been decimated. He couldn't stand the thought of transferring, trading Saturday nights at LSU for half-empty stadiums of 6,500. He couldn't stay in New Orleans, where old friends and old habits would always find him.

He needed time to collect himself and restore his reputation. Two days after his last practice at LSU, he boarded a plane for Houston and checked into 30-day rehab.

HE LASTED 18 days. "It is just a little damn weed!" he told a counselor. He left early on a whim, jumping into a car with his girlfriend and driving back to Baton Rouge. He re-enrolled at LSU and then, nearly two months later, was arrested for marijuana possession. His lawyer suggested rehab again—a different one, also in Texas, where leaving wouldn't be so easy.

Mathieu arrived at the facility in November, the costs paid for by members of his family, with a new beard and his hair dyed back to its original color so nobody would recognize him. The rehab was a 40-bed facility with stucco walls, set on 50 rural acres, a private place that didn't promote itself to the general public. Mathieu accepted no visitors. He slept in a single bed in a room with whitewashed walls; other patients slept in medically supervised detox lodges. The patients in his therapy group were addicted to meth, heroin and PCP. Nobody else, he says, had come to rehab for marijuana. He spent six hours a day with his therapy group, working through the 12-step approach popularized by Alcoholics Anonymous. They worked to acknowledge their mistakes. They talked about summoning strength from a higher power. They ate every meal together in a cafeteria and watched movies about addiction on Friday nights in the lounge.

Three days after Mathieu checked in, a law student from New York told him he looked familiar. "Hey, you're the Honey Badger," the

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New Yorker said. Mathieu denied it, but the law student pulled up pictures of him online. Mathieu's identity became their secret, the trust that formed an unlikely bond. The law student was a sports fanatic from a wealthy family, a lousy athlete who was addicted to OxyContin. Mathieu talked to him about football, and the law student talked about addiction.

"You can still go in the second round," he told Mathieu.

"You can still go back to finish law school," Mathieu said.

Mathieu told him his own addiction wasn't so bad. "Just weed," he said again. "More of a habit really." But the law student used that word to challenge him. Wouldn't a "habit" be easy to give up? Wouldn't a "habit" have allowed him to stay in school and play for LSU? How much more would he let this "habit" cost him?

"He had this will to quit that was inspiring for me," said Mathieu, who for the first time began to think of his marijuana use as an addiction. "It was competitive, like, 'If these dudes can beat all this other stuff, I better be able to beat marijuana.'"

Before he left rehab, Mathieu was asked by his counselors to make a list of the qualities he liked about himself and the qualities he wanted to change. The past few weeks had shaken him. He started by writing what he liked and filled half a page: Loyal. Genuine. Talented. A lover, even if he hadn't experienced true love yet.

Then he moved to the qualities he wanted to improve, a list that spilled onto a second page: Disloyal. Not assertive. Not able to tell people no. Impulsive. Unlucky. No types of boundaries.

"I have so much to fix," Mathieu said.

After they left rehab, the law student and the other patients moved to a halfway house. Mathieu flew to Florida, signed with an agent and declared for the NFL draft.

PROGRESS MANIFESTS in a hundred tiny ways, and late one morning in the Florida heat, Mathieu decides that one opportunity to showcase his recovery is to crush the 40-yard dash. It is a trivial drill that has nothing to do with drugs and little to do with actually playing football, but the NFL's relentless process of talent evaluation has a way of exaggerating the inconsequential. Maybe, Mathieu thinks, if he can consistently run the 40 in less than 4.5 seconds, a general manager will see that he is fit, that he is disciplined, that he can set a goal and achieve it. Maybe his stock will rise and he will be picked in the first or second round.

"I have to nail this," he says one afternoon, bending into a sprinter's crouch on an empty field at Lynn University in Boca Raton. A lawn mower whirs in the distance. Two college students stop on their walk to class and watch.

Patrick Peterson stands at Mathieu's side with a stopwatch. Mathieu's best friend, now a two-time Pro Bowler for the Arizona Cardinals, shares the same agent and has agreed to devote three months of his offseason to mentoring Mathieu. Peterson is everything Mathieu wants to become: a 22-year-old with Hall of Fame potential, a mansion in Arizona and a sterling reputation. Peterson has started a journal to detail his work with Mathieu, taking daily notes on their drills and writing down the motivational aphorisms "Eyes to the future" and "Win it all back" and "Put all your eggs in one basket."

On this morning, Peterson decides that Mathieu is not even ready to sprint the entire 40 yards in practice. First he needs to master the 10-yard start, perfecting every micromovement of his acceleration.

"Come on, Ty. Not good. Get your hips lower," Peterson says after Mathieu runs one, in 1.47 seconds.

"Straighter, faster," he says, after another one in 1.43.

"You're not impressing anybody," he says, after another in 1.41.

Peterson often tells Mathieu that a good defensive back needs to be in the best shape of any player on the field, and he uses that mantra again and again to push his protégé to the brink of collapse. They sprint together in a sandbox. They do aerobics in a swimming pool. They stretch with resistance bands. They spin in circles to dizzy themselves before sparring in a boxing ring, disoriented, punch-drunk, leaning against each other or the ropes. "I want to find your breaking point," Peterson tells him.

It is the same breaking point his counselors have repeatedly warned him to avoid, which is the dichotomy at the heart of being both a recovering addict and an NFL prospect. How can he tend to his sobriety from the brink of exhaustion? How can he avoid stress when even running 10 yards in practice results in scrutiny and dissection? How can he re-dye his hair, shop for sponsorship deals, hold news conferences and re-embrace the Honey Badger nickname for what he calls brand reasons when that very brand fueled his addiction in the first place?

He runs four more times, none of them fast enough, then walks off the field. "Break time," he says. He goes back to his apartment, his head a jumble of commitments. An autograph dealer wants him in New York. A television show wants to film him lifting weights at a gym in Detroit. At least a dozen NFL teams want to interview him in person, which means a dozen trips and a dozen more long conversations about marijuana. Nike and Under Armor are thinking about endorsements, he says, but those depend on what happens at the draft, which

"IT WAS COMPETITIVE, LIKE, 'IF THOSE DUDES CAN BEAT THIS OTHER STUFF, I BETTER BE ABLE TO BEAT MARIJUANA.'"

MATHIEU, WORKING OUT IN BOCA RATON AFTER HIS SECOND STINT IN REHAB

depends on his 40 times, which depends on those damn first 10 yards.

Darkness comes and his apartment starts to feel small. His agent's assistant has already taken his car for the night. He tries to call his sponsor but fails to connect; Mathieu changed his number again earlier in the day to cut ties with more old friends, and now his phone is temporarily out of service. He thinks about knocking on a neighbor's door to borrow a phone, but he doesn't know any neighbors. He turns the TV on. He turns the TV off. He opens the fridge. He is tired of heating up hot dogs.

"I'm tripping," he says.

He decides to go for a walk.

HE HEADS out the front door, out the community gate and onto Linton Boulevard. The six-lane road is a rush-hour traffic jam of horns and headlights, and Mathieu squints against the neon. He wears sandals and mesh shorts, with high socks colored to look like rainbows. His yellow hair glows in the streetlights. He walks over a bridge and beyond a traffic light. After he travels nearly a mile, he stops at a gas station.

He buys a phone card from the clerk because he wants to call his girlfriend, but the clerk explains that the gas station has gotten rid of its pay phone. The nearby McDonald's doesn't have a pay phone either, so Mathieu buys some chicken nuggets and keeps walking. He makes it to an Outback Steakhouse, where the pay phone is out of service and where the hostess at the front desk offers to call him a cab. "Screw it," Mathieu says. "I'll get one myself." He mumbles his way back to the sidewalk, his words drowning in the hum of a nearby interstate. He stands at the curb and tries to wave down a taxi.

"Hey!" he says, motioning to a driver. The cab drives by, oblivious to the former Heisman candidate on the sidewalk.

"What the hell, man," he says.

Then after another cab drives by a few seconds later: "This is bull—! This is crazy. This is one of those nights when I want to just smoke a blunt, man. But I can't! I can't."

He remembers a tip that a rehab counselor gave him once—a last resort for when his sobriety begins to feel threatened. He walks to another gas station and buys a can of spearmint chewing tobacco. The traffic on Linton Boulevard starts to thin, and the sidewalks are empty. It is almost 8 p.m. The stores around him are dark and unfamiliar. "What am I doing here?" he says. "Where am I?"

He is somewhere between stressed and in control, between addicted and sober, between rehab and the NFL.

"I have to take the edge off," he says.

He tucks a pinch of chewing tobacco against his lip and imagines the beach and the lighthouse. Then he lowers his head and starts to walk. ■

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THE BEST-DRAFTING TEAM IS ...

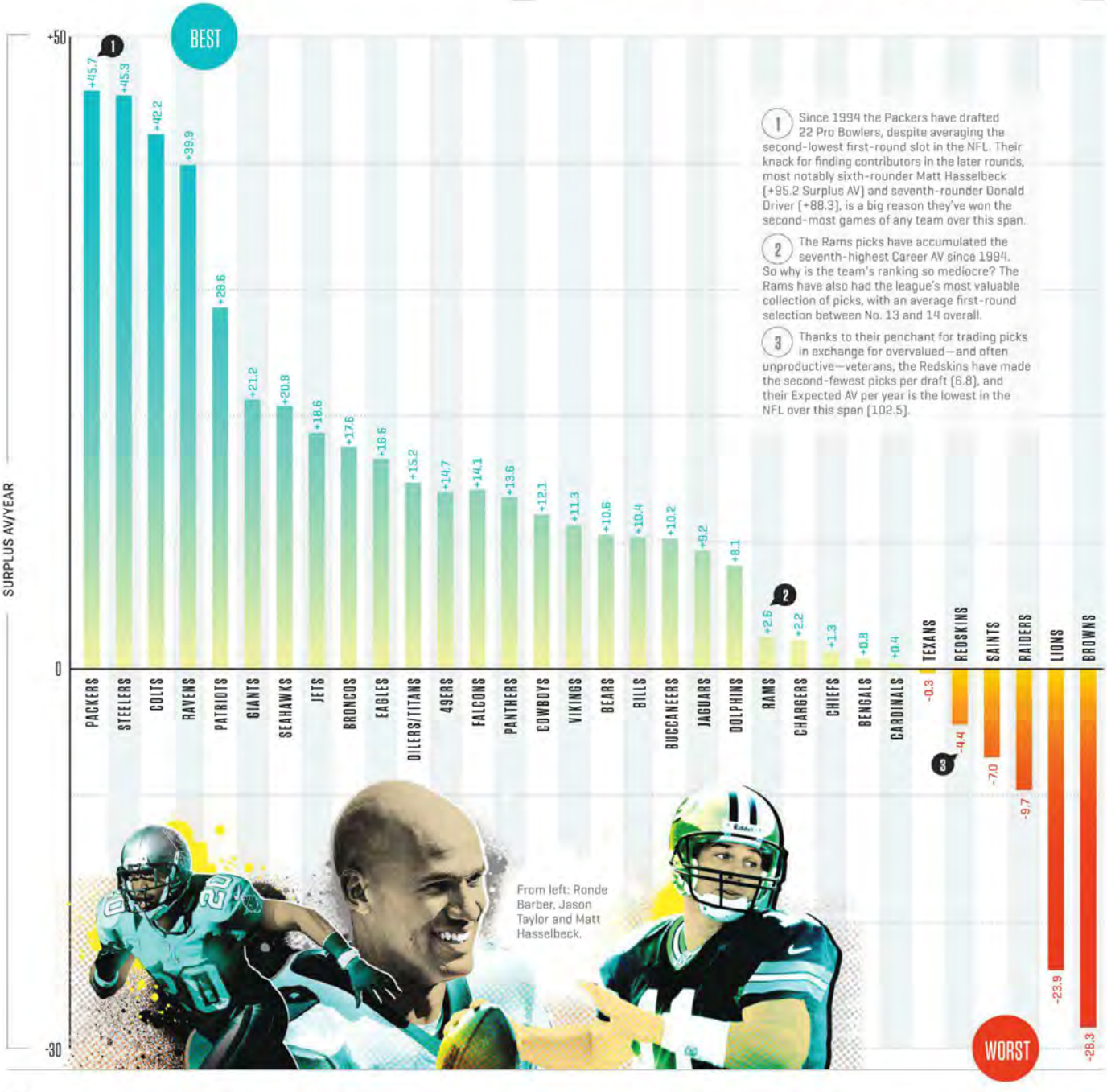
To uncover which teams have been the wisest pickers since the NFL draft went to seven rounds in 1994, we turned to Pro Football Reference's Approximate Value metric (see right). Turns out, the six franchises atop our rankings have won 11 of the past 13 titles. In other words, the Super Bowl really is won in April. —NEIL PAINE

HOW WE RANKED THEM

WHAT'S AV? AV is an approximate measure of a player's value within a given season or career. To calculate AV, Pro Football Reference first accounts for how good or bad a given team was on offense/defense (relative to the league average), then assigns an approximate value to each player based on his contributions to that team, using metrics like games started, Pro Bowls and All-Pros, along with stats particular to each position.

WHAT'S SURPLUS AV? For a player, it's calculated by subtracting the expected value of his draft slot (Expected AV) from his actual value (Career AV). For example, Tom Brady's Career AV (178.0) exceeds the Expected AV of the No. 199 pick (7.9), giving him a +170.1 Surplus AV. For a team, Surplus AV per year—the metric by which every team is ranked—is the Surplus AV of all its picks divided by the number of drafts in which it participated since 1994. The equation:

(CAREER AV − EXPECTED AV) ÷ YEARS = SURPLUS AV/YEAR



1 Since 1994 the Packers have drafted 22 Pro Bowlers, despite averaging the second-lowest first-round slot in the NFL. Their knack for finding contributors in the later rounds, most notably sixth-rounder Matt Hasselbeck (+95.2 Surplus AV) and seventh-rounder Donald Driver (+88.3), is a big reason they've won the second-most games of any team over this span.

2 The Rams picks have accumulated the seventh-highest Career AV since 1994. So why is the team's ranking so mediocre? The Rams have also had the league's most valuable collection of picks, with an average first-round selection between No. 13 and 14 overall.

3 Thanks to their penchant for trading picks in exchange for overvalued—and often unproductive—veterans, the Redskins have made the second-fewest picks per draft (6.8), and their Expected AV per year is the lowest in the NFL over this span (102.5).

From left: Ronde Barber, Jason Taylor and Matt Hasselbeck.

illustration by JOSUE EVILLA

FROM LEFT: KIM KLEMENT/USA TODAY SPORTS; STEVE MITCHELL/USA TODAY SPORTS; KEVIN REECE/AP IMAGES; ALLEN KEE/GETTY IMAGES

WHEN SOMETHING NEEDS TO BE DONE YOU MAKE IT HAPPEN.

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IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION BELOW.

Do not take VIAGRA if you take nitrates, often prescribed for chest pain, as this may cause a sudden, unsafe drop in blood pressure.

Discuss your general health status with your doctor to ensure that you are healthy enough to engage in sexual activity. If you experience chest pain, nausea, or any other discomforts during sex, seek immediate medical help.

In the rare event of an erection lasting more than 4 hours, seek immediate medical help to avoid long-term injury.

If you are older than age 65, or have serious liver or kidney problems, your doctor may start you at the lowest dose (25 mg) of VIAGRA. If you are taking protease inhibitors, such as for the treatment of HIV, your doctor may recommend a 25-mg dose and may limit you to a maximum single dose of 25 mg of VIAGRA in a 48-hour period. If you have prostate problems or high blood pressure for which you take medicines called alpha blockers, your doctor may start you on a lower dose of VIAGRA.

In rare instances, men taking PDE5 inhibitors (oral erectile dysfunction medicines, including VIAGRA) reported a sudden decrease or loss of vision or hearing. It is not possible to determine whether these events are related directly to these medicines or to other factors. If you experience sudden decrease or loss of vision or hearing, stop taking PDE5 inhibitors, including VIAGRA, and call a doctor right away.

VIAGRA should not be used with other ED treatments. VIAGRA should not be used with REVATIO or other products containing sildenafil.

VIAGRA does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, facial flushing, and upset stomach. Less commonly, bluish vision, blurred vision, or sensitivity to light may briefly occur.

Please see Important Facts for VIAGRA on the following page or visit viagra.com for full prescribing information.

*Data taken from the *Massachusetts Male Aging Study*. Of 1,290 respondents, 52% stated that they had some degree of ED.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.FDA.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

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IMPORTANT FACTS

(vi-AG-rah)

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION ABOUT VIAGRA

Never take VIAGRA if you take any medicines with nitrates. This includes nitroglycerin. Your blood pressure could drop quickly. It could fall to an unsafe or life-threatening level.

ABOUT ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION (ED)

Erectile dysfunction means a man cannot get or keep an erection. Health problems, injury, or side effects of drugs may cause ED. The cause may not be known.

ABOUT VIAGRA

VIAGRA is used to treat ED in men. When you want to have sex, VIAGRA can help you get and keep an erection when you are sexually excited. You cannot get an erection just by taking the pill. Only your doctor can prescribe VIAGRA.

VIAGRA does not cure ED.

VIAGRA does not protect you or your partner from STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) or HIV. You will need to use a condom.

VIAGRA is not a hormone or an aphrodisiac.

WHO IS VIAGRA FOR?

Who should take VIAGRA?

Men who have ED and whose heart is healthy enough for sex.

Who should NOT take VIAGRA?

- If you ever take medicines with nitrates:
  - Medicines that treat chest pain (angina), such as nitroglycerin or isosorbide mononitrate or dinitrate
- If you use some street drugs, such as "poppers" (amyl nitrate or nitrite)
- If you are allergic to anything in the VIAGRA tablet

BEFORE YOU START VIAGRA

Tell your doctor if you have or ever had:

- Heart attack, abnormal heartbeats, or stroke
- Heart problems, such as heart failure, chest pain, angina, or aortic valve narrowing
- Low or high blood pressure
- Severe vision loss
- An eye condition called retinitis pigmentosa
- Kidney or liver problems
- Blood problems, such as sickle cell anemia or leukemia
- A deformed penis, Peyronie's disease, or an erection that lasted more than 4 hours
- Stomach ulcers or any kind of bleeding problems

Tell your doctor about all your medicines. Include over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal products. Tell your doctor if you take or use:

- Medicines called alpha-blockers to treat high blood pressure or prostate problems. Your blood pressure could suddenly get too low. You could get dizzy or faint. Your doctor may start you on a lower dose of VIAGRA.
- Medicines called protease inhibitors for HIV. Your doctor may prescribe a 25 mg dose. Your doctor may limit VIAGRA to 25 mg in a 48-hour period.
- Other methods to cause erections. These include pills, injections, implants, or pumps.
- A medicine called REVATIO. VIAGRA should not be used with REVATIO as REVATIO contains sildenafil, the same medicine found in VIAGRA.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF VIAGRA

Side effects are mostly mild to moderate. They usually go away after a few hours. Some of these are more likely to happen with higher doses.

The most common side effects are:

- Headache
- Feeling flushed
- Upset stomach

Less common side effects are:

- Trouble telling blue and green apart or seeing a blue tinge on things
- Eyes being more sensitive to light
- Blurred vision

Rarely, a small number of men taking VIAGRA have reported these serious events:

- Having an erection that lasts more than 4 hours. If the erection is not treated right away, long-term loss of potency could occur.
- Sudden decrease or loss of sight in one or both eyes. We do not know if these events are caused by VIAGRA and medicines like it or caused by other factors. They may be caused by conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes. If you have sudden vision changes, stop using VIAGRA and all medicines like it. Call your doctor right away.
- Sudden decrease or loss of hearing. We do not know if these events are caused by VIAGRA and medicines like it or caused by other factors. If you have sudden hearing changes, stop using VIAGRA and all medicines like it. Call your doctor right away.
- Heart attack, stroke, irregular heartbeats, and death. We do not know whether these events are caused by VIAGRA or caused by other factors. Most of these happened in men who already had heart problems.

If you have any of these problems, stop VIAGRA. Call your doctor right away.

HOW TO TAKE VIAGRA

Do:

- Take VIAGRA only the way your doctor tells you. VIAGRA comes in 25 mg, 50 mg, and 100 mg tablets. Your doctor will tell you how much to take.
- If you are over 65 or have serious liver or kidney problems, your doctor may start you at the lowest dose (25 mg).
- Take VIAGRA about 1 hour before you want to have sex. VIAGRA starts to work in about 30 minutes when you are sexually excited. VIAGRA lasts up to 4 hours.

Don't:

- Do not take VIAGRA more than once a day.
- Do not take more VIAGRA than your doctor tells you. If you think you need more VIAGRA, talk with your doctor.
- Do not start or stop any other medicines before checking with your doctor.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- This is only a summary of important information. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for complete product information OR
- Go to **www.viagra.com or call (888) 4-VIAGRA (484-2472).**

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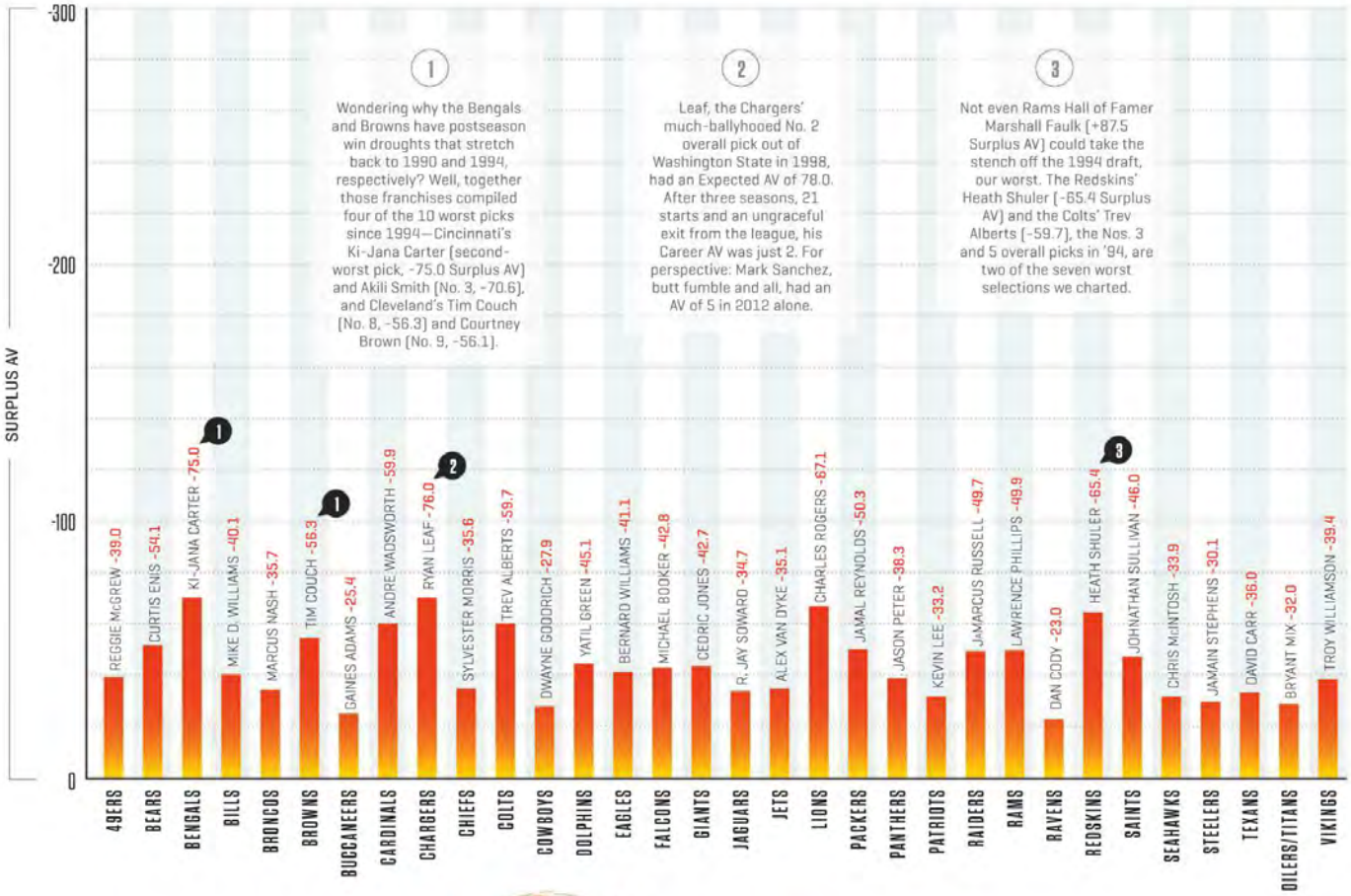
THE BEST PICKS ARE ...

To determine each franchise's best picks since 1994, we once again turn to Surplus AV: the difference between what a player has actually produced in his NFL career and what he was expected to produce based on his draft slot. Naturally, some of the most valuable picks are those who come later in the draft, since much less was expected of them.

FROM LEFT: PAUL SPINELLI/AP IMAGES; TOM DIPACE (4)

THE WORST PICKS ARE ...

Yes, it's possible to have a *negative* Surplus AV. That's what happens when the cost outweighs the return—when a player's on-field play comes up short compared with what was expected of him based on his draft slot. Think first-rounder-turned-benchwarmer-turned-insurance-salesman. Here are each team's worst draft-day mistakes since 1994.



FROM LEFT: TOM DIPACE; G. NEWMAN LOWRANCE/AP IMAGES; GREG TROTT/AP IMAGES; JAMES D. SMITH/USA TODAY SPORTS; MARK WILSON/AP IMAGES

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THEY WILL MOCK YOU

Call it a guessing game if you want. But Todd McShay and Mel Kiper Jr. studied countless hours of tape and talked to dozens of sources before making these educated hunches about how the NFL draft's first round will shake out on April 25. You just have to pick which mock draft to trust.

Todd McShay
Director of college scouting for Scouts Inc.

Mel Kiper Jr.
ESPN's resident NFL draft expert since 1984.

FOR MORE DRAFT INTEL FROM OUR EXPERTS, CHECK OUT ESPN.COM/INSIDER RIGHT UP TO THE FIRST PICK, AND STAY TUNED ALL THE WAY TO NO. 254.

	Todd McShay	Mel Kiper Jr.
1 KANSAS CITY CHIEFS	**LUKE JOECKEL** OT I TEXAS A&M OT Eric Fisher of Central Michigan is slightly more athletic, but Joeckel is a more complete player. I also trust his tape more: He's played at the highest level of competition.	**LUKE JOECKEL** OT I TEXAS A&M Joeckel is the total package: a gifted pass blocker who uses great technique and is an imposing force in the run game. He would be an immediate starter in KC.
2 JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS	**DION JORDAN** DE/OLB I OREGON He's deceptively strong, and his range in coverage is unlike anything I've seen for a guy who's 6'6". There's a good chance he'll be the best pass rusher in this class.	**EZEKIEL ANSAH** DE I BYU Yes, the QB question persists, but the Jags have had a deficient pass rush for years. Drafting Ansah gives them a guy who can develop into an explosive edge presence.
3 OAKLAND RAIDERS	**DEE MILLINER** CB I ALABAMA The Raiders need a corner, and Milliner is the most complete one in this class. I wish his ball skills were better, but he has the instincts and cover skills to start immediately.	**SHARRIF FLOYD** DT I FLORIDA The junior has the power to drive back blockers and blow up plays; he would give much-needed help to an Oakland defense that was gashed by the run far too often in 2012.
4 PHILADELPHIA EAGLES	**STAR LOTULELEI** DL I UTAH Lotulelei isn't just a space-eater. He's great at making plays in the run game and will collapse the pocket as a power rusher. A perfect fit as an end in Philly's new 3-4.	**GENO SMITH** QB I WEST VIRGINIA By drafting Smith, Philly is in a good position to develop an athletic, talented passer who can succeed in Chip Kelly's offense without having to start in 2013.
5 DETROIT LIONS	**ERIC FISHER** OT I CENTRAL MICHIGAN This is a perfect fit. The Lions are in desperate need of a left tackle, and Fisher—with his elite pass-blocking skills—is the No. 2 player on my overall board.	**DEE MILLINER** CB I ALABAMA With Ansah already off the board, Detroit can plug a leaky pass defense and fill its second-biggest need with Milliner, the most physical cover corner in this draft.
6 CLEVELAND BROWNS	**EZEKIEL ANSAH** DE I BYU The difference between Ansah and other D-ends in this class is sheer power. His combination of athleticism, explosiveness and length (6'5", 271) is too good to pass up here.	**DION JORDAN** OLB I OREGON I love this fit for Cleveland. Jordan is freakishly athletic, a guy you can simply unleash in a 3-4. He would be a huge upgrade to one of the NFL's worst pass rushes.
7 ARIZONA CARDINALS	**LANE JOHNSON** OT I OKLAHOMA Johnson's athleticism makes his ceiling a little higher than Joeckel's or Fisher's. But he also carries a little more risk because he's played only one season at left tackle.	**ERIC FISHER** OT I CENTRAL MICHIGAN They have other needs, but keeping their new (and mostly immobile) QB Carson Palmer upright is a top priority. Johnson is a distinct possibility if Fisher is off the board.
8 BUFFALO BILLS	**BARKEVIOUS MINGO** DE/OLB I LSU I was tempted to put Geno Smith here, but I'm hearing the Bills might be higher on USC QB Matt Barkley. In Mingo, Buffalo would get a much-needed speed rusher.	**JONATHAN COOPER** OG I NORTH CAROLINA The Bills are solid up front, but losing left guard Andy Levitre in free agency could hurt their strong run game. Cooper has the skills to make the Pro Bowl as a rookie.
9 NEW YORK JETS	**JONATHAN COOPER** OG I NORTH CAROLINA Cooper and Bama's Chance Warmack are two of the best guards I've ever evaluated. It's absurd how light Cooper (6'2", 311) is on his feet; he's just so athletic.	**BARKEVIOUS MINGO** DE/OLB I LSU The interior of the Jets' defensive line is solid, but the team needs edge speed. Mingo is exactly the type of athletic pass rusher who could become a star in Rex Ryan's defense.
10 TENNESSEE TITANS	**SHARRIF FLOYD** DT I FLORIDA If Oakland passes on Floyd, there's not a great fit for him until the Titans. They would gladly take a player some teams consider the best overall prospect on the board.	**CHANCE WARMACK** OG I ALABAMA The Titans were much better at blocking for the pass than the run last year, and Warmack (6'2", 317) is one of the most imposing run blockers to enter the draft in years.
11 SAN DIEGO CHARGERS	**CHANCE WARMACK** OG I ALABAMA If Lane Johnson is still on the board, the Chargers should take him. If not, they can't go wrong with Warmack, who plays with unbelievable balance and is a force in every facet.	**LANE JOHNSON** OT I OKLAHOMA Left tackle is San Diego's biggest need. Johnson, a former juco QB, is a pretty gifted athlete for his size (6'6", 303) and has been a star during the evaluation process.
12 MIAMI DOLPHINS	**XAVIER RHODES** CB I FLORIDA STATE I'm not that high on Rhodes, but he has the length and straight-line speed to hold up in press-man coverage. He would fill a need if the Fins don't trade up for a left tackle.	**D.J. FLUKER** OT I ALABAMA After Miami lost Jake Long in free agency, second-year OT Jonathan Martin will likely shift to the left side, leaving a gaping hole on the right that Fluker can fill immediately.
13 TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS	**TAVON AUSTIN** WR I WEST VIRGINIA You don't find many guys with Austin's combination of quickness and speed (4.34 40). Critics say he can be stopped in press coverage, but good luck getting a hand on him.	**STAR LOTULELEI** DT I UTAH This isn't the Bucs' top need, but now that Lotulelei has been cleared medically, he becomes a steal this low. You can never have too much depth along the D-line.
14 CAROLINA PANTHERS	**SHELDON RICHARDSON** DT I MISSOURI There hasn't been a difference maker on Carolina's interior D-line since Ron Rivera arrived. Richardson would give the coach a DT who can get upfield and disrupt.	**SHELDON RICHARDSON** DT I MISSOURI Carolina's run D was mediocre in 2012—even after drafting MLB Luke Kuechly. Richardson would help keep blockers out of the second level and also make tackles.
15 NEW ORLEANS SAINTS	**ALEC OGLETREE** ILB I GEORGIA Ogletree might not be a perfect fit for the Saints' 3-4, but he's one of the most explosive linebackers—both in coverage and vs. the run—I've ever evaluated.	**JARVIS JONES** OLB I GEORGIA Forget his subpar pro day. Jones still led the nation in sacks (14) against the elite competition of the SEC. He's a perfect pass-rushing fit for the Saints' new-look D.
16 ST. LOUIS RAMS	**CORDARRELLE PATTERSON** WR I TENNESSEE As a pure athlete, he might be in the top five of this draft. But with just one year at the FBS level, his route-running, like the rest of his game, is raw.	**TAVON AUSTIN** WR I WEST VIRGINIA The loss of slot receiver Danny Amendola in free agency stings, but believe it or not, Austin could be an upgrade. He's one of the true home run threats in this draft.

JOE FARAONI/ESPN IMAGES (2)

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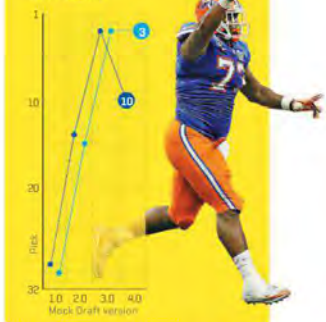
	Todd McShay	Mel Kiper Jr.
17 PITTSBURGH STEELERS	**JARVIS JONES** DLB I GEORGIA On tape, Jones looks quicker off the edge than his 4.92 40. He'd be a perfect fit in the Steelers' attacking 3-4, which doesn't put as much emphasis on size outside.	**TYLER EIFERT** TE I NOTRE DAME I really like this fit. Eifert would help offset the loss of WR Mike Wallace by causing matchup headaches. He's too tall (6'6") for DBs and too fast (4.68 40) for LBs.
18 DALLAS COWBOYS	**KENNY VACCARO** S I TEXAS I've seen enough tape of Vaccaro to know he can be a top-tier NFL starter. He can drop down and cover slot receivers and give Dallas the versatile safety it's been seeking.	**SYLVESTER WILLIAMS** DT I NORTH CAROLINA The Cowboys' two starting DTs, Jay Ratliff and Jason Hatcher, are 31 and 30, respectively. Williams, an active, powerful interior presence, would be a jolt of youth up front.
19 NEW YORK GIANTS	**D.J. FLUKER** OT I ALABAMA Fluker isn't an NFL left tackle, but he has developed the footwork and balance to hold up on the right. He'd be an asset to the Giants, especially in the run game.	**DESMOND TRUFANT** CB I WASHINGTON Versatile with great footwork and underrated ball skills, Trufant can play slot or outside, man or zone. He's the do-it-all corner the Giants' thin secondary needs.
20 CHICAGO BEARS	**TYLER EIFERT** TE I NOTRE DAME Chicago signed tight end Martellus Bennett, but he can be inconsistent. Eifert's ball skills in the red zone would make him one of Jay Cutler's favorite targets.	**MANTI TE'O** LB I NOTRE DAME Put the drama and the combine 40 time aside and you have a guy who makes plays. Te'o would be a reliable long-term solution at one of the Bears' biggest needs.
21 CINCINNATI BENGALS	**DESMOND TRUFANT** CB I WASHINGTON Trufant is one of the top man-to-man cover corners in this draft. He has good speed and instincts. Scouts rave about his interviews. He's a luxury pick here.	**ALEC OGLETREE** ILB I GEORGIA Ogletree has some of the best tape in the draft. He would be an immediate upgrade for the Bengals over Rey Maualuga, who just wasn't good last year, particularly in coverage.
22 ST. LOUIS RAMS	**SYLVESTER WILLIAMS** DT I NORTH CAROLINA This isn't a pressing need, but the Rams are in a position to draft for value. With Williams, they would get a guy who has the skills to be a solid disrupter for a long time.	**KENNY VACCARO** S I TEXAS Craig Dahl, who missed three games at safety during his four years as a Ram, is gone. Vaccaro is a guaranteed upgrade in the NFC West, where good safeties are vital.
23 MINNESOTA VIKINGS	**BJOERN WERNER** DE I FLORIDA STATE This is a pick based completely on value. I don't know if Werner can be a double-digit sack guy, but he's strong against the run and plays with a relentless motor.	**CORDARRELLE PATTERSON** WR I TENNESSEE The Vikings need a weapon after trading Percy Harvin, and Patterson looks like this draft's highest-upside receiver. He's electric.
24 INDIANAPOLIS COLTS	**KEENAN ALLEN** WR I CALIFORNIA Allen can contribute right away. He may never be more than a good No. 2 receiver, but in Indy, he'd be a solid option for Andrew Luck opposite Reggie Wayne.	**XAVIER RHODES** CB I FLORIDA STATE If an offensive lineman the Colts want doesn't fall here, Rhodes makes sense. He'd have a chance to be Indy's best corner after he gets a little seasoning.
25 MINNESOTA VIKINGS	**MANTI TE'O** LB I NOTRE DAME Here's the reality with Te'o: He plays fast. He's a run-and-hit linebacker, so if he's behind Pro Bowl defensive tackle Kevin Williams, it would allow him to do just that.	**KEVIN MINTER** LB I LSU Either Ogletree or Te'o could be available. But if you poll people around the NFL, Minter's name is right next to theirs. The Vikings could pencil him in for Week 1.
26 GREEN BAY PACKERS	**MENELIK WATSON** DT I FLORIDA STATE Tackle is the biggest need: Aaron Rodgers was sacked an NFL-high 51 times in 2012. Watson is green but moves well and has the potential to become a solid starter.	**EDDIE LACY** RB I ALABAMA Lacy offers the best combo of power and open-field shiftiness. He would give the Pack something they lack: an explosive, reliable force in the run game.
27 HOUSTON TEXANS	**DEANDRE HOPKINS** WR I CLEMSON Hopkins isn't overly explosive but has some of the most dependable hands in this class. He'd certainly bring more consistency to the Houston passing attack.	**ROBERT WOODS** WR I USC The Texans need to find a reliable route runner, one who can create space opposite Andre Johnson. Woods can do just that—both underneath and over the top.
28 DENVER BRONCOS	**JAMAR TAYLOR** DB I BOISE STATE This is the time to draft a future starter opposite Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie. Taylor has fluid hips, above-average instincts and very good recovery speed.	**D.J. HAYDEN** CB I HOUSTON The Broncos need to think about drafting another corner. Champ Bailey can't play forever. Hayden would be a high-ceiling pick while adding depth at a key position.
29 NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS	**JUSTIN PUGH** OG I SYRACUSE Pugh's shorter arms (32") mean he'll have to move inside to guard, but that'd be just fine with the Patriots, who could stand to bolster their interior offensive line.	**JUSTIN HUNTER** WR I TENNESSEE Bill Belichick has been searching for a legitimate deep threat since Randy Moss left town. Hunter has the elite straight-line speed that safeties are forced to respect.
30 ATLANTA FALCONS	**CORNELLIUS CARRADINE** DE I FLORIDA STATE Even with Osi Umenyiora, Atlanta needs depth on the D-line. Carradine has shown the ability to rush from both ends and set the edge against the run.	**KYLE LONG** OL I OREGON The Falcons have a need at guard, and Long—who plays both guard and tackle—gives them options. He could help inside for the short term before moving outside.
31 SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS	**JOHN JENKINS** DT I GEORGIA Jenkins, at 346 pounds, was more involved in backside pursuit than a lot of 250-pound D-linemen I studied. He'd fit as a nose tackle or an end in the Niners' 3-4.	**MARGUS HUNT** DE I SMU Pound for pound, Hunt (6'8", 277) is as good as any athlete in this draft. The 49ers have D-line depth, so they could let Hunt bulk up before asking him to start.
32 BALTIMORE RAVENS	**QUINTON PATTON** WR I LOUISIANA TECH Patton isn't a carbon copy of Anquan Boldin, but he has the speed and athleticism to be a reliable target for Joe Flacco alongside No. 1 receiver Torrey Smith.	**JONATHAN CYPRIEN** S I FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL Even with the addition of Michael Huff, the Ravens are still in the market for a safety. Cyprien is an effective tackler in space who could step in and start immediately.

STOCK REPORT

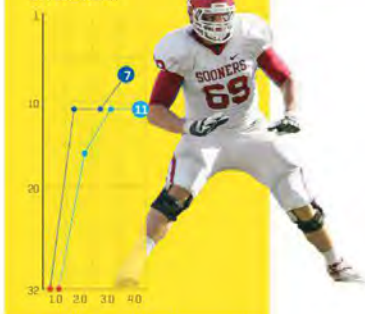
From Mock Draft 1.0 to 4.0 (4.1 for Todd, but who's counting), these players have watched their values change the most among first-rounders.

Todd McShay ■ Mel Kiper Jr. ■ Not ranked ■

SHARRIF FLOYD
DT I FLORIDA

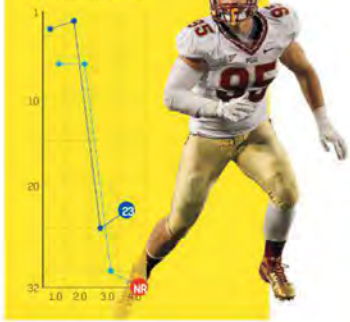


LANE JOHNSON
OT I OKLAHOMA



MANTI TE'O
LB I NOTRE DAME

BJOERN WERNER
DE I FLORIDA STATE



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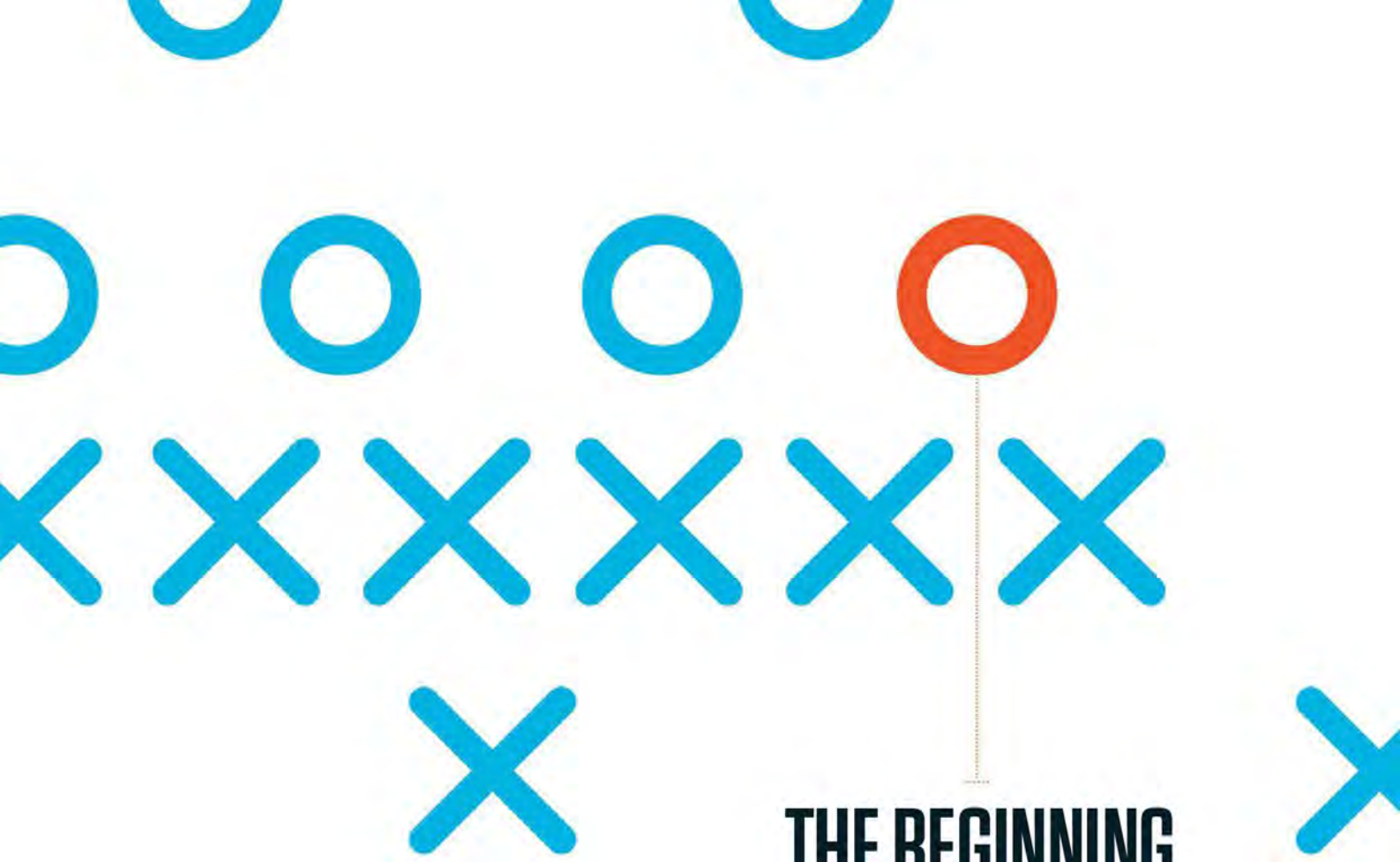

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

How did Ezekiel Ansah become the draft's top defensive end? Everybody—even opponents he has torched along the way—has a Ziggy story to tell.

by RYAN McGEE

WHEN EZEKIEL ANSAH ARRIVED ON the BYU campus in the fall of 2008, the trilingual former soccer player from Ghana had not only never played football, he'd never even seen a game on TV. He was an actuarial science major on academic scholarship. He was also 6'5" and 271 pounds, so he tried out for the Cougars' basketball team. He got cut. So he tried out again in 2009 ... and got cut again. Ansah then walked on to BYU's track team as a sprinter. But all the while, coaches and classmates kept telling him: You should try out for football.

He finally took their advice in 2010. Based on pure athletic ability, he made the team and saw his first game action midway through that season covering kicks. By 2012, Ansah was a starter at defensive end for a Cougars squad that went 8–5, nearly ended Notre Dame's winning streak in October and won the Poinsettia Bowl in December. Now Ansah is expected to become just the 11th Cougar—and the first since 2000—to be selected in the first round of the NFL draft. Everyone has fallen for the affable kid who in three short years has progressed from someone who couldn't identify an end zone to being the best defensive end prospect in the country. Here's how it happened.

1|DL

NFL DRAFT 2013

EZEKIEL ANSAH
DE | BYU

GOOD FIT
JAGUARS

ROUND
01

PICK
02

"This kid has been on a meteoric rise up the draft board like I haven't seen in 35 years. His production at BYU was light, and he wasn't a starter until early in his final season. But he is physically gifted, truly in a special category. You're drafting potential with Ansah... but there is a lot of it." —MEL KIPER JR.

KYLE VAN NOY BYU | LINEBACKER
"Ziggy's first practices as a walk-on in 2010 have kind of become legend, but it's all true. He tried to cram the wrong pads into the wrong slots on his pants. He put his shoulder pads on backward. The first times he lined up, he either just stood there straight up or he'd get down like a frog on all fours. But nobody laughed at him because he was so big we were afraid of what he might do to everyone if he got mad."

BRONCO MENDENHALL BYU | COACH
"He had no concept of how to tackle, no idea about leverage or getting low on someone to bring them down. He just ran around hitting stuff, straight up. But he was so fast and so naturally strong that technique didn't matter. The first time we ran him in some kickoff drills at practice, he took off and knocked down about nine guys, all arms, and never broke stride. The play ended and he was just standing there, bodies all over the ground around him, looking like, 'What? Did I do something wrong?' One of the first times we put him into a game was on kick coverage halfway through the 2010 season [against Wyoming on Oct. 23]. The same thing happened. We basically just said, 'Go hit the guy with the ball.' He ran 10 yards ahead of everyone else and brought the player down by himself."

ROMNEY FUGA BYU | NOSE TACKLE
"We got him in the weight room and realized he had no idea what he was doing. He'd never lifted a weight in his life. But we'd all seen him with his shirt off and we thought, Wait, all of this is just DNA?"

CHRIS PETERSEN BOISE STATE | COACH
"We played BYU in our third game of the 2012 season. Thursday night, national TV. It was a super-tight game when we recovered a fumble on their 1-yard line in the second half. Well, BYU has been strong along the defensive front for decades, but their best defensive end [Eathyn Manumaleuna] was out with an injury, so we were thinking we might have an advantage. We were going right at that position. But suddenly this No. 47 blasted in and dropped [running back] D.J. Harper for a loss. Next play, he did it again. They ended up stopping us on downs. We had zero information on No. 47, so our staff was scrambling for a roster, asking, 'Who is this guy?' He was so big, we wondered if maybe BYU had a jersey mix-up and one of its starters had switched numbers for a couple of plays or something. It turned out that Ansah had just never really played before. I don't know how many tackles he had, but it was a lot. And he also blew up a fake punt attempt. On one hand, we felt like, Man, how could we let some unknown guy beat us like that? Then when we saw what he did the rest of the year, it was like, Oh, he did that to everybody. Unfortunately, he had his arrival moment against us."

STEVE KAUFUSI BYU | DEFENSIVE LINE COACH
"After the Boise game, I ran up to Ziggy with the stats. I told him he had eight tackles, two and a half for a loss, broke up a pass and had the first sack Boise had given up all year. This is a guy who had seven tackles in all of 2011. I was going crazy; he just smiled and said, 'Thanks, Coach, I think I did good too.' I don't think he understood what he'd done. And he did it on national TV, with everybody in the NFL watching."

OMOREGIE UZZI GEORGIA TECH | RIGHT GUARD
"As complicated as people think our offense option is, the goal is really simple: All of us on the offensive line just look across to see who we're facing and say, 'Okay, that's the guy I have to beat on this play.' We're constantly sizing players up, and it takes a lot to surprise me. I'm 6'3", 300 pounds—not a giant, but not small either. Well, we lined up against BYU [on Oct. 27, 2012] and I saw this 6'5" guy standing in. I thought, Whoa! I looked over at [left guard] Shaquille Mason and was like, 'Good luck, dude.' Ansah killed us. He was all over the place all day. But the crazy thing was, the whole time he was smiling and very polite, like, 'This is fun; thank you for playing with us today.' You don't want to like a guy who is beating up on you, but you couldn't help it with him."

TODD McSHAY ESPN NFL DRAFT ANALYST
"I'm watching Ansah film and I get to that Georgia Tech game in which he had eight tackles and a sack. I was so impressed that I started tweeting while I watched. His explosiveness is what separates him from other defensive ends, which is where he'll play in the NFL. He just killed the guard and fullback in the Georgia Tech game. If that fullback quit football forever after that game, I would totally understand."

MENDENHALL
"Remember that first time on special teams? Fast-forward to our last game of 2012, the Poinsettia Bowl against San Diego State. We were calling a defense that had Ziggy as the screen defender. He popped off the line and drew the block from the tackle. When the tackle released, Ziggy turned, got in his hip pocket and made the play. This was a guy who understood the nuances of the game. He was basically fake rushing, inviting the screen so he could make a play on it. That's where we are now, just a couple dozen games removed from 'Go hit the guy with the ball.'"

FOR MORE ON ANSAH AND OTHER IMPACT DEFENSIVE PLAYERS, TURN TO PAGES 78 AND 80.

PREVIOUS PAGE: MICHAEL CONROY/AP IMAGES; THIS PAGE: MARK A. PHILBRICK/BYU

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EZEKIEL ANSAH

DE | BYU

HEIGHT	WEIGHT	BEST 40 TIME
6'5"	271	4.63

One NFL team will spend a very high pick on a guy who has started just nine football games in his life. That's how smitten scouts and GMs are with Ansah's physical prowess. We asked an unnamed scout to provide an unfiltered assessment of Ziggy, then gathered feedback from other experts and the Ghana-born football newbie himself. The verdict? Let's just say the jury is still out.

THE SCOUT

He's raw[1] from the point of view of understanding football. He didn't grow up around the game, didn't even watch it on TV,[2] didn't know any schemes or nuances.[3] But he's a gifted athlete, with crazy power in his legs and upper body.[4] Does he have the instinct, or is he just an athlete playing football?[5] He understands his assignment on a certain play, but we don't know if he understands the game, the difference between how you rush on third-and-long and third-and-short.[6] If you give him time, he'll get it. That's why, overall, I love Ansah.[7]

1 BRONCO MENDENHALL
BYU HEAD COACH
In three years, he went from not knowing how to put on his pads to playing not just OLB but also DE and nose tackle. He's not raw anymore.

2 ANSAH
Growing up in Ghana, I played soccer and basketball. In fact, I never saw a football game until I moved to the U.S. in 2008. And when I did see it, I thought it was a crazy sport.

3 SAM MONSON
PRO FOOTBALL FOCUS
He's fast in a straight line, for sure. But he's routinely dominated at the point of attack and struggles when the block doesn't come from directly in front of him. He's a major project and not worth a high pick.

4 MEL KIPER JR.
ESPN DRAFT ANALYST
Scouts have fallen for his athleticism, which he showcased at the Senior Bowl (1.5 sacks, a forced fumble and a pass breakup). That physical prowess is why he'll go in the top 5.

5 ANSAH
When it comes to knowing the plays and what to do, I learn pretty fast. And I have the instinct.

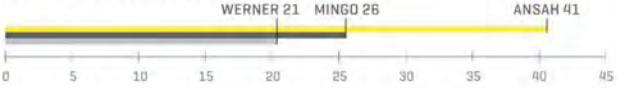
6 BILL POLIAN
ESPN INSIDER/ FORMER COLTS GM
Be careful not to go overboard on him. His unfamiliarity with football will show up, particularly on downs where he's not simply rushing the passer. He's going to struggle in the NFL for a period of time.

7 TODD McSHAY
ESPN DRAFT ANALYST
Within a couple of years, he can become a Jason Pierre-Paul. I don't know if he will or not, but he has that kind of talent.

Here's how Ansah stacks up alongside fellow first-round defensive end prospects Barkevious Mingo of LSU and Bjoern Werner of Florida State.

CAREER GAMES/STARTS

2012 TACKLES AGAINST BOWL TEAMS



2012 SACKS AGAINST BOWL TEAMS

Illustration by BRYAN CHRISTIE DESIGN

DAVID HOOD/CAL SPORT MEDIA/AP IMAGES

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WHAT'S YOUR INTERPRETATION?

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FAVORABLE OPTIONS

As defenses try to counter the read-option offense that's taken the NFL by storm, a coveted draft commodity will be athletic, explosive edge defenders who can wreak havoc as pass rushers and run stoppers. And Ezekiel Ansah isn't the only one on the board. Here's how seven other projected top-50 picks stack up against the read option. —*Steve Muench*

DION JORDAN

COLLEGE Oregon | HEIGHT 6'6" | WEIGHT 248 | POS OLB | BEST 40 TIME 4.60
PROJECTED DRAFT STATUS Top-10 pick

His rare athletic tools—including the ability to change direction, accelerate quickly and step back outside—allow Jordan to play both the handoff and perimeter runs in the read option. And after facing Chip Kelly's up-tempo offense each spring, he knows the drill.

BARKEVIOUS MINGO

COLLEGE LSU | HEIGHT 6'4" | WEIGHT 241 | POS DE | BEST 40 TIME 4.58
PROJECTED DRAFT STATUS Early first round

Mingo, who sacked Heisman winner Johnny Manziel last season, has outstanding top-end speed for his size. He's also so explosive and quick that he can close down on the inside handoff between the tackles or recover to make the play if the offense attacks the perimeter.

BJOERN WERNER

COLLEGE Florida State | HEIGHT 6'3" | WEIGHT 266 | POS DE
BEST 40 TIME 4.83 | PROJECTED DRAFT STATUS Late first round

The German-born former soccer player's effort, range and ability to find the ball are all strengths, but his lateral agility is a question mark. NFL scouts think he could occasionally get exposed in the open field trying to corral athletic quarterbacks like Robert Griffin III and Russell Wilson.

CORNELLIUS (TANK) CARRADINE

COLLEGE Florida State | HEIGHT 6'4" | WEIGHT 276 | POS DE
BEST 40 TIME 4.75* | PROJECTED DRAFT STATUS Early second round

Carradine, who had 22 total tackles against Virginia Tech and Florida before tearing his ACL in that November loss to the Gators, is still learning to locate the ball as a run defender. But he has the first-step quickness and upper-body strength to help with the inside run while he works on his ability to recognize plays. *Unofficial pre-combine time

MARGUS HUNT

COLLEGE SMU | HEIGHT 6'8" | WEIGHT 277 | POS DE | BEST 40 TIME 4.60
PROJECTED DRAFT STATUS Early second round

He's 25, from Estonia and mammoth. Hunt's length and tackling ability (31 tackles, 11.5 for loss, in 2012) allow him to step down and stuff the inside run, but he will have a harder time getting upfield and taking away the outside run.

SAM MONTGOMERY

COLLEGE LSU | HEIGHT 6'3" | WEIGHT 262 | POS DE | BEST 40 TIME 4.81
PROJECTED DRAFT STATUS Early second round

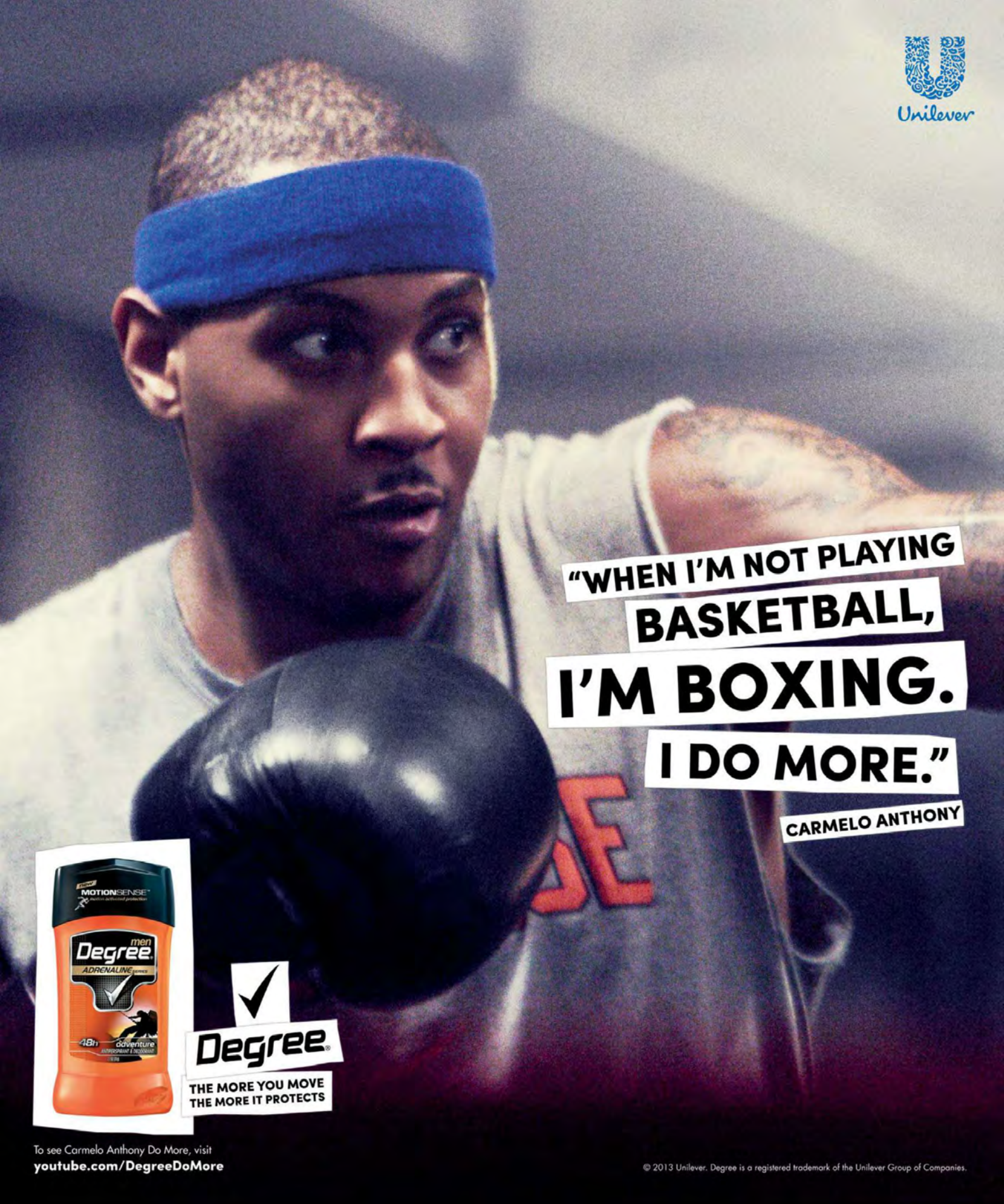
He's not as explosive as his former teammate Mingo, but Montgomery is one of the more disciplined players on this list. He won't get caught off-guard if the quarterback hands off inside and will almost always execute his assignment.

DAMONTRE MOORE

COLLEGE Texas A&M | HEIGHT 6'4" | WEIGHT 250 | POS DE
BEST 40 TIME 4.95 | PROJECTED DRAFT STATUS Mid-second round

Moore's overaggressive nature is a concern, because when he gets caught too far inside on the handoff, he does not recover as well as the elite athletes at the position. That means he's more likely to get burned when the QB keeps the ball.

FROM TOP: STEVE CONNER/ICON SMI; DERICK E. HINGLE/US PRESSWIRE; CHRIS BERNACCHI/AP IMAGES (2); MATTHEW VISINSKY/ICON SMI; BRETT DAVIS/US PRESSWIRE; TONY GUTIERREZ/AP IMAGES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MARCUS LATTIMORE
RB | SOUTH CAROLINA

GOOD FIT

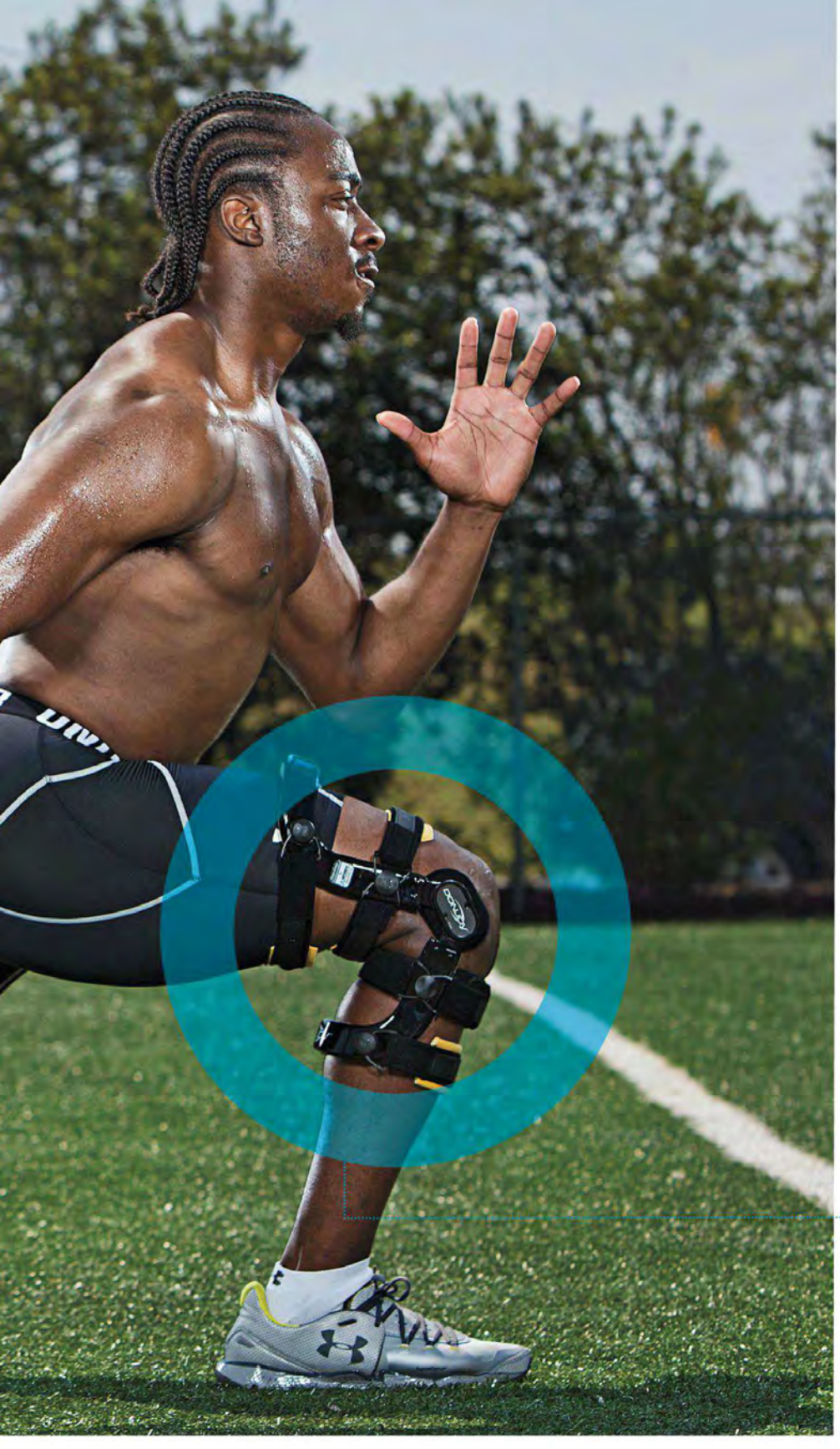
CARDINALS

ROUND	PICK
05	140

The Cards added Rashard Mendenhall in free agency, and Ryan Williams is attempting to return from injury. But Lattimore could really help this team in 2014 after an NFL "redshirt" year (think Willis McGahee). —MEL KIPER JR.

GOAL ORIENTED

Lattimore's rushing TDs versus those of Kiper Jr.'s top 5 running backs:



TWO IN A MILLION?

Until his gruesome knee injury, South Carolina running back Marcus Lattimore was a first-round lock. Now teams want to know: Can he beat the odds and return to form (Hello, Adrian)?

by RYAN McGEE
photographs by STEVE BOYLE

OCT. 27, 2012

"I SAW MY KNEECAP OUTSIDE MY LEG, JUST TOTALLY IN THE WRONG PLACE."

LATTIMORE, ON THE INJURY THAT DERAILED HIS JUNIOR SEASON

"**SMALL MOVES, MARCUS.** Small moves."

It is 10:45 a.m. in Gulf Breeze, Fla. Tucked behind the famously tacky sign beckoning vacationers to Pensacola Beach, famed orthopedist Dr. James Andrews' Athletes' Performance facility is filled with the desperate activities of football players on the mend—nearly two dozen damaged dreamers, each hoping to repair both his body and his NFL draft stock.

Standing in an open garage, offensive linemen rehabbing shoulder injuries grunt their way through 440-pound dead lifts, the weights crashing to the mat with yells and clacks. On the field behind the brick building, defensive backs and wide receivers explode through 40-yard dashes, their recently repaired elbows and knees flinging sweat and cracking away scar tissue. And in the shadowed space between the lifters and the sprinters, quietly grinding it out in slow inches rather than intense bursts, is Marcus Lattimore.

The mood in the gym is resolutely positive, everyone acting as if he will become pro. Yet deep down, there's the knowledge that only a handful will actually realize that shared dream. Hell, the odds were already long. As distressed goods, their chances have been stretched even further.

"Bring that back up straighter, Marcus, just an inch or so."

Right now Lattimore is perfectly still, hands pressed against the gray cinder block wall, knees bent, ass out, legs awkwardly supporting the weight of his 6'0", 218-pound frame. This is his 11th exercise of the morning session—the 11th of 30—all performed under the precision-guided eye of Athletes' Performance's tactical performance director, Russ Orr.

"Give me just a half an inch more bend in your knees, Marcus," Orr continues. "Just a half-inch more."

Lattimore appears peacefully trapped in tedium, knowing all too well that the road to healing a bum knee is a monotonous one. One year ago, he was rehabbing his left, beset by an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tear that abruptly ended his sophomore season at South Carolina. "The scar on my left knee used to look so bad to people," he says, touching the telltale dots of arthroscopic surgery. "Now no one even sees that one." He smiles, speaking in a deep-throated voice that belies his gentle nature, reaching beneath the knee brace on his right leg, touching a kneecap parenthesized by two long lines of raised skin. "This one here gets all the attention now."

Five months earlier, that knee had been grotesquely dislocated, with tears in three—ACL, LCL (lateral collateral) and PCL (posterior cruciate)—of its four major ligaments. Now this is the knee that dominates Lattimore's life, altering pre-NFL draft chatter and dictating his worth. The degree to which it can be healed will determine the degree to which he can rekindle what seemed predestined since he was in middle school: playing football on Sundays.

FROM LEFT: JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES; GERRY MELENDEZ/THE STATE/MCT/GETTY IMAGES; THE STATE/MCT/LANDOV (2)

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MARCH 18, 2013

"RG3 JUST KEEPS TELLING ME THAT THE PLAYER I WAS IS STILL IN HERE ... TO NOT GET IN A HURRY AND KEEP WORKING ON THE SMALL STUFF."

LATTIMORE, WHO IS REHABBING WITH ROBERT GRIFFIN III AT ATHLETES' PERFORMANCE IN FLORIDA

The work he put in on the first knee was, in the end, merely a dress rehearsal for the second. That's how he knows that these decidedly unsexy, minimalist workouts will eventually be worth it. "This is all about activation, about rebuilding the pillar that everything else is built on," says Orr. "Crawl to walk and walk to run. We're somewhere in that first half."

Others continue to remind Lattimore of the potential payoff, of the NFL stars who have been where he is now and are now where he's always wanted to be. "This is a world where Adrian Peterson can tear two ligaments in one knee and come back to rush for 2,000 yards in the NFL eight months later," the 21-year-old says between exercises. "And this room we're in—this is the room where he started the road back, inch by inch, just like me."

THE INJURY IS almost too gruesome to watch. On Oct. 27, 2012, with South Carolina leading Tennessee 21-14 late in the first half, Lattimore took the ball on a simple counter, his favorite play. As a freshman in 2010, he posted an otherworldly 1,609 total offensive yards. Before his injury in 2011, he was on pace to shatter that mark, nearly at 1,000 with six games remaining. And now, nine games into the season, Lattimore was at 835 total yards (662 rushing) in Steve Spurrier's evolving, more balanced offense. Earlier in the game, he'd scored his team-leading 11th touchdown.

Lattimore stepped up to the line and made a cut left. As he turned the corner, he was met simultaneously by two Volunteers defenders—linebacker Herman Lathers and cornerback Eric Gordon. With Lathers wrapping up from behind, Gordon blew in from the left, gunning for the ankles. Lattimore's left leg planted, supporting the linebacker's full airborne weight. His right foot came up to step, and with that leg bent and rising, his knee slammed into Gordon's oncoming helmet, cap to crown, and collapsed between the 190-pound defensive back's torso and the grass.

When the upper half of Lattimore's body hit the ground, Lathers rolled him over and away from Gordon, who rose to chase the loose football. As Lattimore's lower extremities whipped overhead, his right leg, from the knee down, was bent strangely at a near-90-degree angle. It flapped directly over his face like a loose flag, slapping into the turf beside him. "As it went by, I saw my kneecap outside my leg, just totally in the wrong place," he says.

As nauseating as the images of the leg are, the look on the player's face as he instinctively reached out to grab his knee is even more devastating to those who knew him best. "The scariest part was the shock," says wide receiver Ace Sanders, another South Carolina NFL draft hopeful. "Anyone will tell you that our locker room looked—still looks—to Marcus as our leader. He's our rock. When he looked scared lying there, it shook us all."

"At that moment, I really believed I was done," Lattimore recalls. "When you look back and see what people were writing and posting on Twitter and Facebook that night, they all thought I was done too."

Digital well-wishes poured in from every corner of the sports world as he rode off the field in the flatbed of an athletic trainer's Gator, a towel covering his face. Players on both sidelines, South Carolina's and Tennessee's, wept. The story of how he'd used his time during his first ACL comeback to reach out to other injured players, even those from rival SEC teams, had quietly created a bit of a Lattimore cult within football circles.

On Sunday, Oct. 28, he was in a Columbia, S.C., hospital. "It was always going to be bad," says Gamecocks team physician Jeffrey Guy. "But when we realized that it was a dislocation and not a break, there was instantly a glimmer of hope." Not of playing football again but of walking normally.

"I just knew he was done with football," says

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MARCH 27, 2013

HIS STORY HAS STRUCK SUCH A CHORD THAT THE COMPLETION OF HIS WORKOUT WAS MET WITH APPLAUSE FROM REPS FROM 31 NFL TEAMS IN ATTENDANCE.

LATTIMORE DIDN'T RUN AT SOUTH CAROLINA'S PRO DAY, BUT HE DID CATCH BALLS.

Lattimore's mother, Yolanda Smith, an outspoken contrast to her quiet son. She gained fame with football moms everywhere when she rushed to her son's side after the first ACL tear in Starkville, Miss. "I had seen my baby hurt before. Now I had seen him hurt again. There was a part of me that said, Let this be over. But that has always been up to him. And he's always done the right thing."

That night, after Spurrier and the other visitors were gone, Lattimore wasn't sure what the right thing might be. In the background, the TV droned with an NFL game. The Broncos were thrashing the Saints 34-14, led by Willis McGahee's 122-yard rushing performance.

On Monday, Lattimore's 21st birthday, he moved into his sister Eboni's apartment. The South Carolina grad had enrolled in a graduate program in order to stay close to Marcus in Columbia. He sat silently, right leg in an immobilizer, staring at the floor, "wondering what I was going to do now." When he did look up, *Monday Night Football* was on. The 49ers were running over the Cardinals—the first of their three TDs set up by a bruising set of runs from Frank Gore.

The next day, barely 72 hours after the injury, Lattimore's phone buzzed with texts from Western time zones. One was from Gore, who had also blown out both knees and joked that two injured legs were better than one. "Now you're not going to favor one or the other ... you're balanced out!"

Another was from McGahee. "I just told him to keep his attitude up," says the Bronco, who suffered a "terrible triad"—ACL, PCL and MCL (medial collateral) injury—playing for Miami in the 2003 national title game against Ohio State. Like Lattimore, he could have returned to college but instead declared for the draft. "At first, it was hard for me not to get caught up in my status, to focus on my rehab. But I realized all of that was out of my control. What I could control was the work I had to do on my knee. That's what I told Marcus."

Also like Lattimore, McGahee was widely considered a pre-injury lock as a high-first-round pick. After the injury, labeled a "medical liability," he was projected to go as low as the fourth round. He still went in the first round, picked 23rd overall by the Bills. And though he didn't play in '03, in the nine years since, he has rushed for 1,000-plus yards four times. "Look to me and Gore," McGahee preached. "And just look at what Adrian is doing."

LATTIMORE HEARS Adrian Peterson's name more than any other. That's who friends, fans and family constantly point to as proof that a comeback isn't just possible but probable. Every media session, predraft expert analysis and chat with NFL front office personnel is peppered with Peterson mentions. Why not? After suffering ACL and MCL tears on Dec. 24, 2011, he was back in the Vikings starting lineup just over eight months later. A year after his injury, he clinched the NFL MVP award while coming within nine yards of breaking Eric Dickerson's single-season rushing record.

"All of the elements that were there with Peterson are there with Marcus," says Spurrier. "The injuries were similar. But so are their work ethics. Their reputations are solid. And Marcus is there in Florida with Dr. Andrews, just like Peterson was."

The Sunday after his injury, Lattimore watched Peterson post 182 yards and a pair of touchdowns against Seattle. "My mind was made up then," Lattimore recalls. "I was done with, What am I going to do? I'd moved on to, This is what I'm going to do."

Peterson and Lattimore have never talked directly. Not yet. But Peterson continues to send words of encouragement through mutual friends, including the Athletes' Performance staff. "My message is pretty simple," Peterson says. "This can be done. You can do it. So do it."

Yet for NFL talent evaluators, the Peterson comparison is a two-sided hill. They want to believe such a recovery can happen again, especially with a player who is universally liked. "I love that kid," says new Eagles head coach Chip Kelly, who met with Lattimore in Philadelphia on March 14 and 15. "I recruited him so hard at Oregon, as much because of his character as his ability."

But the injury is still catastrophic. Lattimore says that when he holds those meetings with NFL executives, they never ask him about his knees. "They want to talk X's and O's and my family life. Everything but the injury. They call Dr. Andrews about that." Still, the player can't help but notice that when he enters each room,

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eye contact and handshakes are punctuated by glances down to evaluate his gait and peek at that scar.

"There is no doubt that the AP story creates more confidence in Lattimore's situation," admitted an NFL scout shortly after watching Lattimore's workout at South Carolina's pro day on March 27. He didn't run, but he did catch balls from a standing position. In a testament to how his comeback story has struck a chord throughout the league, the completion of his gym exercises was met with a round of applause and handshakes from the audience of reps from 31 NFL teams. "It is such an inspiring thing to watch, just like Peterson," the scout says. "But what I have to remind my people on draft day is that the Peterson story is special because it's one in a million. Until Marcus is running real football drills, there's no way of knowing if he's going to be two in a million."

There is also wariness among NFL player-personnel types that their growing confidence in injury-recovery science could easily become overconfidence. Advancements over the past four decades, led by Andrews, are inarguably remarkable. Andrews was among the first surgeons to take sports medicine seriously and in the 1980s went against common practice, forgoing traditional blade-first surgery for less invasive arthroscopic methods. And progress in the past decade has been at light speed compared to the years before it, especially in after-treatment and recovery.

"But this is not a magic wand," says Andrews, who admits having developed an atypical closeness with Lattimore. "We are better as doctors. The bodies we work on are better now. Through genetics and nutrition, today's athletes are built to recover. I am proud of what we did with Adrian, but I've also never seen a knee that clean before we'd even touched it. It looked like a newborn's knee, not someone who had been playing football his whole life. And even as recovery times decrease overall, there are only a few superhumans. Bo Jackson, Adrian, Robert Griffin III. Those are extraordinary cases. Marcus might be in there. But there is still the challenge of preaching patience. These things still take time."

"The goal of any orthopedic procedure is to repair an injury to the point that it is as good as it was before," explains Stephania Bell, a physical therapist and ESPN injury analyst who spent extensive time with Lattimore over the winter. "If you were extraordinary physically before, then fully healed you should be extraordinary again. These are all extraordinary athletes. Not everyone is. But even those special cases have to practice patience."

When Andrews and Bell urge caution, they aren't just addressing NFL front offices. They are talking to their patients, including Andrews' charge Griffin, who let a Week 14 LCL sprain deteriorate into a torn MCL and ACL because he bypassed Andrews and re-entered the game instead of being properly examined.

Griffin had surgery on Jan. 9 and a few weeks later was in an Athletes' Performance swimming pool alongside Lattimore, repeating the patience mantra. "RG3 just keeps telling me that the player I was is still in here," Lattimore recalls. "He said to not get into a hurry. Just to keep working on the small stuff, and when that player inside me is ready to come back out, he will. But not until he's ready."

BACK BEHIND THE building in Gulf Breeze, now on exercise 20, Lattimore and that player inside are playing hide-and-seek. He's really sweating now, standing atop a 1-foot-tall metal-frame box. His left leg is planted straight while he brings his right leg off the ground and pulls it up into a bend, holding it at a 90-degree angle. Up to this point, every exercise has gone smoothly, according to plan. But suddenly, for the first time, there is a bobble. The left knee gives, not a lot but just a touch. The running back looks down at it, confused, and appears perturbed and a little betrayed.

"Okay, okay," Orr says, clapping his hands as he runs to the player's side to offer up a shoulder to lean on. Lattimore refuses. "We found that limit right there. Make a note. I'll make a note. And tomorrow we'll be ready for it. Ready to move past it."

As Orr steps away to write on his clipboard, Lattimore watches him. The moment the trainer looks away, the player sneaks in one more rep. This time it goes off without a hitch.

He hops down off the box and winks. "I couldn't wait until tomorrow." ■

JON GRUDEN:

"TAKE HIM AND SIT HIM OUT A YEAR. HE'LL BE A MONSTER."

IF

I'm a coach, I am going to find a way to convince my front office to get Marcus Lattimore on my roster. I spent some time with him this spring for my *Gruden's Camp* show [Lattimore's episode airs April 15 at 5 p.m. on ESPNU], and I ended up being so impressed by this kid.

He's everything you want in a running back: smart, resilient, a team guy. He has a vicious, slashing style that reminds me a lot of Charlie Garner with the way he finishes runs. Take a look at the tape from his games against Georgia the past two years: He shredded a defense that was full of future NFL players [51 carries for 285 yards in two South Carolina wins]. Or take a look at the way he pass-blocks.

The best pass-blocking backs aren't the guys who know how to do it the best; it's the guys who *like* to do it. Lattimore loves to do it—he can't wait for the opportunity to pass-protect. That makes him one of the rare backs who can truly play all three downs.

I know he has a lot of stuff in his medical file, and most coaches don't have the kind of job security where they can get away with taking a guy with injury problems. But he's going to be worth the risk. I'd take him and sit him out for the entire year. Just let him get healthy. And he will get healthy. Lattimore is going to be a monster in the NFL.

STEVE JOHNSON/ESPN IMAGES

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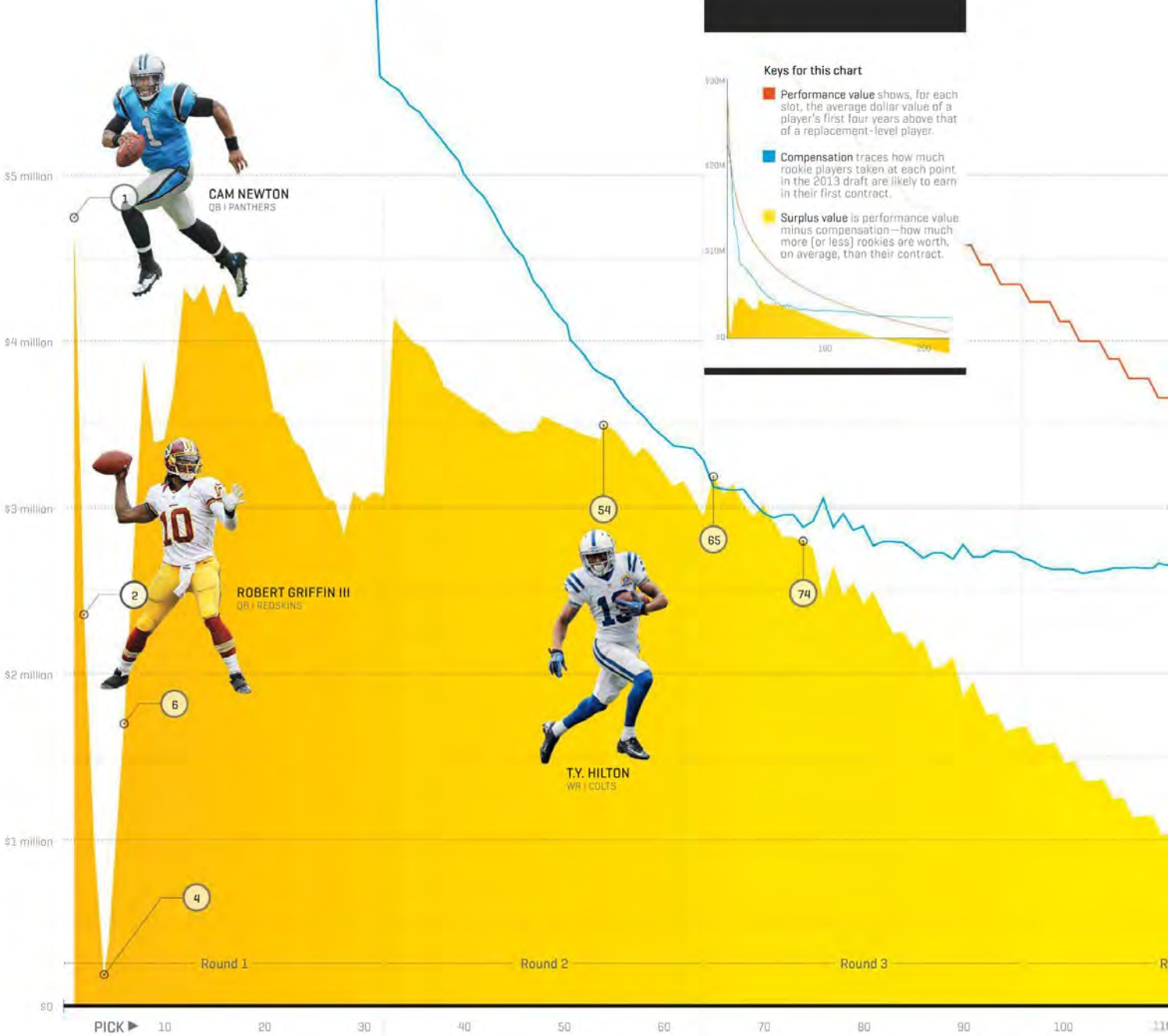


1

BEST VALUE!

Hacking the price of the top pick was a priority of the CBA—no surprise, then, that the four-year, $22 million contracts for **Cam Newton**, 2011's No. 1, and **Andrew Luck**, 2012's, are among the NFL's best deals.

2

THE TRUTH ABOUT RG3

The Redskins surrendered a whopping number of picks and $12 million in surplus value to St. Louis in their dowry for **Robert Griffin III**. RG3 is a star, but it's hard to develop talent around him without draft picks to do so.

4

RIP-OFF NEIGHBORHOOD

Compared with the huge cuts to Nos. 1 and 2, the new CBA just *trimmed* salaries for picks four and five. Because of this inconsistency, the **Eagles** (No. 4 and with a long history of trading down) and **Raiders** (No. 5) can get the most bang for their draft buck by unloading these weirdly expensive picks.

6

LITTLE IMPACT IN ATLANTA

In 2011, after a 13-3 season, the Falcons traded up from No. 27 (surplus value of $3.03 million) to No. 6 ($1.69 million), where they drafted WR **Julio Jones**. To do so, though, they surrendered three picks in the 2011 draft and also two in 2012 (an estimated surplus value of $11.29 million). Jones has been great but not enough to justify that price.

54

COLTS GOT THEIR GUYS BUT AT A PREMIUM

After trading this pick to Miami for CB **Vontae Davis** in 2012, Indy dealt its fifth-rounder to move up to select WR **T.Y. Hilton**. Result: The Colts' picks this year have less projected career value than any other team's.

65

A LION'S SHARE

The Lions' No. 65 pick has more surplus value than the **Jaguars'** first pick, at No. 2 overall.

74

NINERS WELL-EQUIPPED

The 49ers acquired this pick by fleecing the Panthers, grabbing a pick in 2012 and this third-rounder for the No. 103 pick in last year's draft. Carolina used it to select **Joe Adams**, who had seven receiving yards in 2012. All told, the Niners' 14 picks this year have the draft's highest projected career value.

PLAYING THE SLOTS

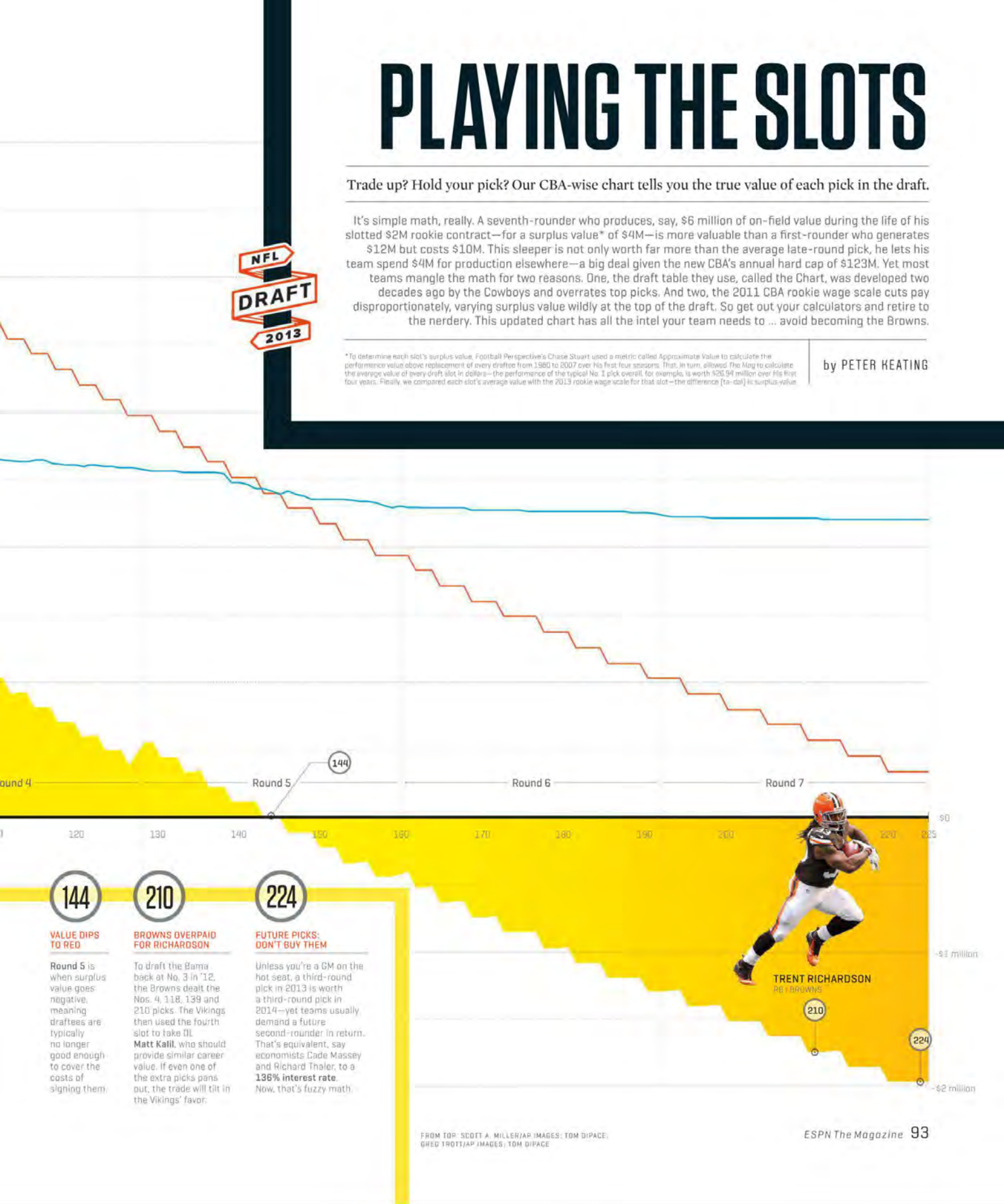
Trade up? Hold your pick? Our CBA-wise chart tells you the true value of each pick in the draft.

NFL DRAFT 2013

It's simple math, really. A seventh-rounder who produces, say, $6 million of on-field value during the life of his slotted $2M rookie contract—for a surplus value* of $4M—is more valuable than a first-rounder who generates $12M but costs $10M. This sleeper is not only worth far more than the average late-round pick, he lets his team spend $4M for production elsewhere—a big deal given the new CBA's annual hard cap of $123M. Yet most teams mangle the math for two reasons. One, the draft table they use, called the Chart, was developed two decades ago by the Cowboys and overrates top picks. And two, the 2011 CBA rookie wage scale cuts pay disproportionately, varying surplus value wildly at the top of the draft. So get out your calculators and retire to the nerdery. This updated chart has all the intel your team needs to ... avoid becoming the Browns.

*To determine each slot's surplus value, Football Perspective's Chase Stuart used a metric called Approximate Value to calculate the performance value above replacement of every draftee from 1980 to 2007 over his first four seasons. That, in turn, allowed *The Mag* to calculate the average value of every draft slot in dollars—the performance of the typical No. 1 pick overall, for example, is worth $26.94 million over his first four years. Finally, we compared each slot's average value with the 2013 rookie wage scale for that slot—the difference (ta-da!) is surplus value.

by PETER KEATING



144

VALUE DIPS TO RED

Round 5 is when surplus value goes negative, meaning draftees are typically no longer good enough to cover the costs of signing them.

210

BROWNS OVERPAID FOR RICHARDSON

To draft the Bama back at No. 3 in '12, the Browns dealt the Nos. 4, 118, 139 and 210 picks. The Vikings then used the fourth slot to take OL **Matt Kalil**, who should provide similar career value. If even one of the extra picks pans out, the trade will tilt in the Vikings' favor.

224

FUTURE PICKS: DON'T BUY THEM

Unless you're a GM on the hot seat, a third-round pick in 2013 is worth a third-round pick in 2014—yet teams usually demand a future second-rounder in return. That's equivalent, say economists Cade Massey and Richard Thaler, to a **136% interest rate**. Now, that's fuzzy math.

FROM TOP: SCOTT A. MILLER/AP IMAGES; TOM DIPACE; GREG TROTT/AP IMAGES; TOM DIPACE

KINGS FOR A DAY

For the sixth straight year, we threw an NYC draft party for future pros who won't get to shake hands with the commish.

by MORTY AIN

photographs by BEN WATTS

The Kings (from left): Oklahoma WR Kenny Stills, Notre Dame SS Zeke Motta, Alabama SS Robert Lester, Penn State LB Michael Mauti and Stanford LB Chase Thomas.

STYLING BY JOHN MOORE

ZEKE MOTTA
SS | NOTRE DAME

MEL KIPER JR.'S PREDICTION:

GOOD FIT
JETS

ROUND
07

PICK
215

"TRY TO CROSS ME IF YOU WANT, BUT YOU'RE GOING TO FIND YOURSELF LYING ON THE GROUND."

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PREVIOUS SPREAD (from left): Cars: 2013 Porsche Boxster S and 2013 Porsche 911 Carrera 4S; Stills' tuxedo, shirt and tie: Turnbull & Asser; socks: Calvin Klein; umbrella: Ermenegildo Zegna. Motta's jacket, shirt and pants: John Varvatos; socks: Calvin Klein; shoes: Crockett & Jones; watch: Breitling. Lester's tuxedo and shirt: Hugo Boss; bow tie: Prada. Mauti's tuxedo and bow tie: Turnbull & Asser; shirt: Brioni; shoes: A. Testoni; watch: Guess. Thomas' jacket: Brioni; shirt and umbrella: Ermenegildo Zegna; tie: Turnbull & Asser; socks: Calvin Klein; shoes: Johnston & Murphy; watch: Breitling. **THIS PAGE** (from left): Motta's trench coat: Salvatore Ferragamo; shirt: Ermenegildo Zegna; pants: Paul Stuart; shoes: Fratelli Rossetti; sunglasses: Ray-Ban; umbrella: Ermenegildo Zegna. Thomas' trench coat: Paul Stuart; shirt: Tommy Hilfiger; pants: John Varvatos; belt: Freywille; shoes: Canali; sunglasses: vintage Ray-Ban

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I COULD HAVE PLAYED CORNER, BUT I JUST LIKE SCORING THE TOUCHDOWNS. I GREW UP WATCHING T.O. AND CHAD.

KENNY STILLS
WR | OKLAHOMA

GOOD FIT
RAMS

ROUND
03

PICK
78

FROM LEFT: Thomas' suit: Louis Vuitton; tie: Tommy Hilfiger; pocket square: Turnbull & Asser; shoes: Johnston & Murphy; watch: Breitling. Stills' suit, tie and pocket square: Paul Stuart; shoes: Crockett & Jones; watch: Breitling

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GOOD FIT
CHIEFS

ROUND
05

PICK
134

"MY ATHLETICISM HAS ALWAYS BEEN A QUESTION MARK, BUT I GET TO THE BALL. AND I DON'T MISS TACKLES."

FROM LEFT: Thomas' suit, shirt and pocket square: Turnbull & Asser; tie: Ermenegildo Zegna; shoes: A. Testoni; watch: Breitling. Mauti's suit: John Varvatos; shirt: Tommy Hilfiger; tie: Ermenegildo Zegna; pocket square: Paul Stuart; shoes: Crockett & Jones. Lester's jacket and tie: Tommy Hilfiger; shirt: Hugo Boss; pocket square: Ermenegildo Zegna; pants: J. Crew; belt: RRL by Ralph Lauren; shoes: Johnston & Murphy; sunglasses: Ray-Ban

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ROBERT LESTER
SS | ALABAMA

GOOD FIT
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ROUND
05

PICK
136

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MICHAEL MAUTI
LB | PENN STATE

GOOD FIT
GIANTS

ROUND
07

PICK
225

"THEY SAY I RUN A 4.8, BUT I DON'T RUN NO 4.8. EVERY COACH WHO'S EVER TIMED ME HAS ME AT A 4.50 OR 4.55. WHITE BOY CAN RUN."

PREVIOUS PAGE: Lester's suit jacket and vest: Paul Stuart; pants: Gucci; tie: Tom Ford; sunglasses: Oliver Peoples; headphones: Beats by Dre. **THIS PAGE** (from left): Mauti's suit: John Varvatos; tie and shirt: Brioni. Stills' suit jacket and shirt: Salvatore Ferragamo; pocket square: Turnbull & Asser; pants: Tom Ford; hat: H&M; sunglasses: Oliver Peoples; watch: Breitling

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MICHAEL MAUTI

"I came to Penn State a boy and left a man," says Mauti, a 243-pound linebacker who rose above injuries, the death of Joe Paterno and the Jerry Sandusky sanctions that resulted in a four-year bowl ban. "Everyone was asking, 'Are you going to transfer?' " Mauti says. "Within an hour, we decided we weren't going anywhere." That didn't stop rivals from recruiting. "We had eight Illinois coaches on campus trying to poach us. That backfired." Mauti got his revenge with two picks (one for 99 yards) in a 35-7 drubbing of the Fighting Illini on Sept. 29. He had been projected as high as a second-round pick until November, when he suffered his third ACL tear. So he sent handwritten notes to every NFL GM: "I wanted them to know that I've torn my ACL and come back before. I've proven I can do it." In other words, he's not going anywhere.

KENNY STILLS

"People see my hair and tattoos and expect an a—hole," Stills says. For his draft prep, the six-foot, 194-pound receiver dumped the dye job but not the attitude that helped him become an Oklahoma star. In three seasons, he caught 204 passes, scored 24 TDs and dropped a couple of YouTube-worthy blocks on Texas defensive backs in a 63-21 blowout on Oct. 13. But a 2011 DUI and a 2012 Twitter pic of Stills in a bridesmaid dress had NFL execs wondering. "Teams straight up asked me if I was gay because of that picture." (He says no, it was just a joke.) It's not the first time he has been questioned: Stills carries around the letter he received this year from the NFL suggesting he stay in school. Instead, he ran the 40 in 4.38 at the combine and showed stellar body control. Your move, NFL.

ZEKE MOTTA

Off the field, Motta calls himself a modern-day hippie, dispensing wisdom to friends. Amid the Manti Te'o storm, he dropped this Dr. Seuss line on his Notre Dame teammate: "Those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind." With his helmet on, the 6'2", 213-pound safety calls himself a crazy monster looking to hit anything that moves. In 2012 he was named defensive player of the year for the Fighting Irish squad that played for the national championship. Unfortunately, at the combine Motta finished last among safeties in the 40 and the bench press. But by his pro day six weeks later, he had lopped 0.12 off his dash and added five reps to his bench. Motta just needs one NFL team to look past the numbers and see the whole picture. Those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind.

ROBERT LESTER

The former Alabama safety needs both hands to wear all of his SEC and national title rings. But the bling comes with a catch. "People think that if I played well it's because of the players around me," says Lester, who had 14 picks in three seasons. "Plus, Coach Saban brainwashed us to think that every time we step on the field we're going to win. It kills the joy of winning. But now I'm a guy who doesn't know how to lose, and I'm taking that mindset to the NFL." Scouts, though, question the 6'1", 220-pounder's cover skills, and his 4.66 40 at the combine didn't excite them either. But Lester's strength is his instinct for the game, highly developed even though he didn't strap on the pads until 11th grade. "I know what's going to happen on the field before it happens," he says. If only that were true of draft day.

CHASE THOMAS

In Thomas' redshirt season, Stanford went 5-7. Two years later, the Cardinal were Orange Bowl champs. Then in 2011, as an All-America outside linebacker with five forced fumbles and 8.5 sacks, Thomas could have joined Andrew Luck in the NFL draft. But the 6'3", 244-pounder returned as a senior with a goal in mind: the Rose Bowl. The result? Stanford's first Pac-12 title since 1999 and its first Rose Bowl victory since '72. "The days of moral victories are over at Stanford," he says. Thomas called the coverages because of his ability to spot formations. But NFL scouts wonder whether he can hang with quicker route runners in man coverage. "I've been working on my drops, staying low and getting more flexible," he says. Now he has an NFL goal in mind: "I want to hit Andrew Luck because I was never allowed to in practice."

FROM LEFT: Mauti's trench coat and tie: Ermenegildo Zegna; suit: Turnbull & Asser; shoes: Johnston & Murphy. Stills' jacket and shirt: Bottega Veneta; pocket square: Turnbull & Asser; hat: JJ Hat Center; sunglasses: Ray-Ban; pants: Naked & Famous Denim at Barneys New York; boots: Johnston & Murphy. Motta's suit: Burberry London; shirt and pocket square: Brioni; watch: Raymond Weil; socks: Paul Stuart; shoes: Fratelli Rossetti; umbrella: Paul Stuart. Lester's coat: Brioni; shirt: Ermenegildo Zegna; pants: Turnbull & Asser; scarf: Canali; belt: Paul Smith; sunglasses: Persol; shoes: Fratelli Rossetti. Thomas' suit: Tommy Hilfiger; shirt and pocket square: Paul Stuart; tie: Tommy Hilfiger; shoes: Crockett & Jones; sunglasses: vintage Ray-Ban

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by CHRIS JONES

[AFTER-SCHOOL JOB] *The Red Sox's new nighttime PA announcer teaches history by day. Which, when you think about it, is a perfect combination.*

Henry Mahegan's first day as the new voice of Fenway Park began in Room 426 of Charlestown High School, in the long shadows of the history he teaches. Portraits of presidents line one wall; on another hangs a photograph of a young B.B. King. The 32-year-old Mahegan stood in front of them and his students, and he cleared his throat, and he talked in his deep, warm tenor about time and its passage: who and what brought us here, and why it's important that we remember the beginnings that gave us our middles and ends. But teenagers, even Boston teenagers, even kids who grew up around landmarks and monuments, can have a hard time seeing beyond the concerns of the present. One raised his hand. "Did you bring us Sox tickets?" he asked.

They know about Mahegan's new job; they know that he'll be spending his evenings surrounded by yet more history. He's never been shy about his other love, filling his classroom walls with a silent audience of ballplayers, staring back at the presidents. There's Ted Williams, captured midswing. There's Jim Rice, glaring out from his Hall of Fame plaque.

In fact, baseball had been Mahegan's preferred course of study for most of his life. He began working for the Red Sox in 2004, virtually right out of college, first in their publications and archives department and later in media relations. He was also, unofficially, the backup for the team's longtime PA announcer, Carl Beane. Mahegan knew baseball, and his voice was strong enough to survive Fenway Park's notoriously bad acoustics. (A waitress recently asked him if he did voice work. His proud girlfriend, Alyssa, said: "Tell her, you have to tell her!") But Beane never missed a game. In 2010 Mahegan, who comes from a family of teachers, decided to pursue a different calling. "I made room in my brain for other things" is how he put it, and he left Fenway Park for Room 426.

Then Beane died suddenly last May, and after the Red Sox made it through the rest of last season with a series of guests—including Mahegan, hastily pressed into service for the first five games following Beane's death—they spent this offseason searching for a more permanent replacement. They heard more than 340 auditions, including the open tryouts featured in a previous column (the Music Issue, Feb. 18). That baritone chorus of hopefuls was narrowed to 35 and finally to five. In the end, the Red Sox opted for a three-man platoon. Dick Flavin and Bob Lobel, retired local TV personalities with grandfatherly voices, will share the day games. Mahegan's more youthful, crisper tone will ring out every night. "I couldn't be more thrilled," he says.

In a place so steeped in tradition, his voice has a big vacuum to fill. Mahegan knows that. Like Boston's baseball fans, the history teacher requires no instruction. On his first night, April 10 against the Orioles, Mahegan greeted old friends, sat down in his chair, took a sip of water, pressed a big red button, leaned into his microphone and ... didn't say much at all. From his first sentence—"Good evening, everyone"—to his first blood donor of the game—Kevin Broderick of Marshfield, Mass.—and his first batter—Nate McLouth—he understood why so much else here goes unsaid. The skies opened up just as McLouth stepped to the plate, and somebody remembered that it had rained during Carl Beane's first game too, but nobody filled in the rest of the quiet, because they were all thinking the same thing. Everybody was on the same page.

Mahegan knew that here they introduce players by their position first and then their number, but saying the number only once because the Yankees say it twice. He knew that they never call Fenway Park "America's most historic ballpark," because that honor goes to Pittsfield's Wahconah Park, but they do call it "America's most beloved ballpark"—and when they do, beloved is always pronounced with two syllables, not three. And he knew that the last words out of his mouth every night will be the last batter he happens to introduce, that he will never return to announce that the game is over, or to say thank you and good night.

Henry Mahegan knows not to say those things because of the lessons history has taught him. Everything has a beginning. And there is almost always a middle. But baseball—like time, like love—never really ends. ■

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